Sevens

11 - It Would be Nice if there're no Family Disputes by your time, Eleventh Generation

Wai

Prologue

“Eh? … Who might this lovely lady be?”

Inside the Jewel.

Seeing the woman taking a place at the round table, and waving her hand at me, I tilted my head.

When I came because I was called, besides the Fifth- who was seated with a stern expression- the ancestors looked quite confused.

Looking at the woman, I couldn’t help but recall Miranda, and there I noticed she was the matured form of Milleia-san, of whom I’d seen in the rooms of memories.

“Could you be Milleia-san?”

When I saw her in memory, she was in her teens. But the one before my eyes looked to be in her mid-twenties.

『Correct, Lyle. But as you’ve seen me in my youth, your reaction is a little slow. After seeing someone’s face for the first time, remember their name alongside it. Weren’t you taught that?』

I did learn that skill. But I didn’t have the chance to put it to practice in my childhood.

Hearing those words for the first in a while, I looked at the Fifth in confusion.

Rising from his seat, he lowered himself onto the round table, and let out a sigh.

『Why is Milleia here, you ask? Like hell we know. That’s why we’re so confused. According to the girl himself, there’s a need for you to learn everything, she says.』

A need for me to learn everything?

Curious about what that everything would indicate, I sent a look to Milleia-san. Her light violet, wavy hair and golden eyes reminded me of Shannon.

But her facial features and atmosphere were more Miranda. Body structure also Miranda…

(Feels like someone took out the good points of those two?)

If her insides were like Miranda's, it would be troublesome. If they were like Shannon's, I would have nothing but pity. Of course, I haven't the slightest idea what sort of person she is.

『Lyle, you never entered your own room of memories, so it ended up that I came out here to act as a guide.』

I looked at the door behind my seat.

My door was different to those of the ancestors. It didn't just replicate memories. It had become a different sort of something.

It wasn't necessary to our present situation in reality, so I had ignored it.

(The Jewel won't permit me to ignore, I guess?)

But there was another reason I didn't enter as well.

"Um… I'm busy right now, so is it possible to put it off to a later date?"

With a troubled expression Milleia-san looked at the surrounding ancestors.

The Third spoke with his usual manner.

『Yes, you've got a point. We're busy, so is it alright we put it on hold? At this point, even if you tell us it's 'everything,' that's a bit troubling.』

The Fourth corrected the positioning of his glasses.

『I do want to listen to the wishes of my granddaughter, but it's low on the priority list.』

The Seventh, slightly bothered.

『Even if it's auntie's request, that's impossible. Because we're busy.』

I just realized that would make her the Seventh's aunt. Milleia-san looked at the Fifth.

He scratched his head.

『… I don't know what you want to get Lyle to do. If it benefits our side, I will prioritize it.』

There, Milleia-san smiled.

『As I thought, you sure are kind, father. Even so, these memories of the heads of history are truly troubling. It's a little sad how you've twisted the meek Lyle.』

And how exactly should I react to that?

(If you're dealing with these ancestors, you'd get twisted whether you like it or not.)

Milleia-san stood, and walked all the way to my side. She kindly held up both of my hands.

My heart was beating, but it wasn't in regards to the opposite gender. It more like… a motherly impression.

『Lyle, there is a need for you to know everything about Skills. Why the Walt House's blue gem became a Jewel… and what gems were originally supposed to be.』

I recalled back to what Monica's sisters had once put to words in the Labyrinth.

"Memories, was it? I believe I heard something like that."

She nodded.

『That's right. Gems and Jewels are nothing more than memory storage mediums. The records of our lives, and even our personalities were recorded… the recording of Skills was just a

byproduct.』

Hearing her words, the Third…

『As I thought. I did think it strange. A situation where we taught Lyle our Skills can't be called efficient. Then should there originally have been another purpose? … For example, transferring personality to another?』

Not in his aloof bearing, he and the other ancestors sent sharp looks towards Milleia-san.

While I was troubled by them, Milleia-san shook her head with a smile.

『That's also wrong. That is why there is a need for us to have Lyle know everything. At present, many gems have been lost. The appearance of Magic Tools also meant the decline of gems, after all.』

The Seventh took her words with wonder.

『Meaning if things went their natural course, gems wouldn't have been discarded? Could someone be pulling the strings out back?』

Without answering those words, Milleia-san pulled my hand, and started off towards the door.

『Lyle, learn it all. Otherwise, your story will surely be left incomplete.』

Led by the hand, I didn't put up a resistance, as I opened and entered the door with her.

❼

When I entered my own room of memories, the surroundings were too bright.

I couldn't keep my eyes open. Milleia-san called out.

『This is your room of memories… as well as the memories of the

Jewel. The Jewel wanted you to know. That's why it has reproduced such an unnatural sight.』

I slowly opened my eyes, and there spread out a town I had absolutely no memory of. No, perhaps a metropolis?

Looking around, the people were downing drinks and making merry regardless of the height of the sun in the sky.

"Where are we?"

『… It started out as kindness. This is the capital of a country of the distant past. A country that fell some thousands of years ago. You know it too, don't you? The magician's village?』

It looked as if they weren't living any differently from how we lived now, but now that you mention it, there was a bit of an olden feel to it.

The clothes the people wore, their shoes…

The ale they drunk was of one single type. The food lined up was all simple stuff. Perhaps I should call it frugal in contrast with its scale?

(But if it were the past, would it be possible? And why does the Jewel have records this old? The First bought his gem two to three hundred years ago, didn't he?)

In the capital that was neither of Bahnseim or Sentras, I followed behind Milleia-san.

The voices I could hear led me to believe everyone was in festive spirits.

"Is it some sort of holiday?"

The merry adults. And the playing children.

But Milleia-san's answer was difference.

『… This a a normal week day for this country. Lyle, can you see that building?』

In the direction her finger pointed was a building still under

construction.

There, I could see the figures of mud-made dolls working.

“Is it magic?”

Looking closely, there were many golems working around. But it didn’t look as if there was a magician nearby.

I walked on with Milleia. We walked straight ahead, and a building comparatively simple in construction to the rest of the metropolis came into sight.

『Yes it’s magic. And the one maintaining this city is but a single magician.』

I noticed.

“So what became the base for the Magician’s Village story was…”

『… This country. And this country’s magician is【Septem】. The Seventh Goddess.』

Hearing Septem, I remembered Celes’ Jewel.

In front of the simple building, the golems acted as gatekeepers. And as we approached, they opened the road, and let us through.

That modest estate, while stationed in the center of the city, was small enough to call out of place.

I couldn’t feel the slightest presence of people within. The only ones working were golems.

Led by Milleia-san, I entered a certain room.

There, on a small bed, an old woman lay.

『… Oh my, how rare. For guests to come for me.』

The kind-looking old woman lay down with a weakened figure. Even so, she looked at us with a smile.

“Eh? She can see us…”

Milleia-san nodded, and brought over two chairs from the other side of the room

『Lyle, if you don't sit, Septem-sama won't be able to calm down.』

"Eh, no, um… Septem-sama? H-huh?"

I had thought Septem was the one behind the curtains. Thought I wasn't sure whether she was manipulating her, or an accomplice. But I couldn't imagine this kind-looking person as Celes.

『Could you please sit? You're making me feel sorry.』

A withered slenderness, her hair was white, and there was a glimmer in her violet eyes. But perhaps her body couldn't keep up with that glimmer, as she wasn't moving.

A golem entered the room, and fiddled with the old woman… Septem's bed, raising the upper half of her body so she could talk with us.

『I'm really sorry. I'm sure you don't understand anything yet. I am Septem… no, one who inherited her memories. I carried on the memories of a goddess.』

Hearing that only deepened my confusion. Milleia-san gave an explanation for my sake.

『Lyle, you know the stories of goddesses and evil gods, don't you? Of them, who is it that is the most revered?』

"Number seven… the last goddess."

『Right. Both magic and Skills were something the Seventh Goddess granted to humans. And gems were developed by this Septem-sama over here.』

I looked at Septem with surprise. Her grinning face definitely didn't look like that of a person who would do evil.

Milleia-san continued on.

『The Walt House's gem. It's an original she made. Many others are just imitations made by Agrissa… no, perhaps she copied the

original to make something more complete. Such is the Jewel Celes holds. For that sake, she produced countless gems, so they ended up catching on three hundred years ago.』

Septem looked at me apologetically.

『I never thought the gems I made were to be used like that in the future. I'm sorry, Lyle. It seems those girls were right.』

"Those girls?"

Shen I responded, Septem spoke.

『Right. Nihil, Octo, and Novem… one isn't spoke of, and the others were made evil gods of. 』

"… Novem… and even Nihil. So you mean to say…"

Milleia-san spoke to me.

『Novem is the same as Septem-sama. She should have carried on the memories of a goddess. Of course, from the world's point of view, that would be an evil god.』

Hearing that truth, I received a light shock.

(No, if you know this and that, then say it, Novem.)

❼

Inside the Jewel.

When I exited the door with Milleia-san, the Ancestors were waiting for us.

The Fifth looked at my expression.

『So did you learn something?』

I nodded, but it's not like I learned everything. It seems there was more she wanted to tell me, but Milleia called for a pause.

"This and that. Like how Novem carries on a goddess' memories. Of

how Novem's clan carries the blood of a goddess, and how the Walt House's Jewel is an original. Stuff like that. And it seems the one who made the gem was Septem."

Hearing that, the Fourth.

『… No, if you don't explain it properly, we won't understand it, you know?』

Milleia-san looked over the ancestors.

『Lyle, return to reality. I'll explain the rest.』

"… I'll leave it to you. And wait, it's a bit too much of a shock."

Milleia-san looked at me.

『I'm sure Novem has her circumstances. So don't blame her for it. I'm sure that girl will serve you, even if you reject her. But that would be much too pitiful to watch.』

I immediately…

"No, I don't hate her, you know? But when I think of who she is, does that mean I'm actually loved by a goddess… that sort of thing?"

Milleia-san's eyes opened wide, and she put both hands to her mouth.

『… Lyle, you're being corrupted too much by your ancestors.』

The seventh, perhaps protesting against that opinion.

『What are you talking about, auntie? This is just how men of the Walt House are.』

The ancestors gave some, 'Right, right' s before laughing amongst themselves.

❼

When I opened my eyes, I was in an inn at the harbor.

Opening my eyes in our rented room, I saw that night had already come to a close. Nearby, by my awakening, Monica activated.

“Oh, you’ve gotten up faster than usual today. Good grief, please think of the troubles of your maid. What a bothersome chicken dickwad you are. But I love that part of you too.”

Seeing her behave as usual, I felt a little relieves.

“Sorry about that. Today’s our departure, right?”

Monica moved, took up a bucket, began producing tools from between her apron and skirt, and began filling the bucket with hot water.

“Yes. We’ve confirmed it with Vera-san, so there is no doubt about it. It seems there is a lot of cargo to carry to Beim on this voyage. They’re quite busy. Because of that, they were unable to meet the queen of Cartaffs, or something.”

“What do you mean by or something? Well, I can understand them being busy.”

“Neither side could make time for the other. This country’s queen is quite busy as well… it couldn’t be you’re thinking of adding her to the harem? I’ll follow you no matter how much a scumbag you may be, but going after a queen will make even I question your preferences. Damn masochist!”

I felt I was being made fun of, so I stood, and refuted.

“Wrong! No, I just thought it would be nice if I could meet her.”

I had thought to ask for cooperation against Celes. I didn’t have any other goals.

Having been dispatched from Beim to Cartaffs on a Guild request, the Land Dragons subjugated, we were going to return right back to Beim.

We had to go a considerable distance, and by the time we returned to the port, the ship we planned to board was to depart in a few days.

We did the job in time, but there were other things that bothered me.

“… Those attackers. 【Larc Maillarde】, was it? According to the rumors, it seems his actions are so varied it’s hard to get a hold on him.”

We identified their identity and aim. But without evidence, we couldn’t take legal action against them; what’s more, we couldn’t even find out where they’d disappeared to.

The information we gathered- ‘incorrigible,’ ‘sociable,’ ‘good tempered,’ ‘garbage,’ ‘the adventurer I want to grow up to be’- were just as varied.

From the consistently high evaluations he received from woman, it could be concluded he had a Skill that worked on the opposite gender.

It wasn’t something we could deal with in the few days before we left Cartaffs. It left some lingering regret, but if we didn’t go to Beim, we wouldn’t get a reward for our work.

“We don’t have the time to care for Larc, I guess. There are plenty of problems we’ll have to resolve once we get back as well.”

Monica carried out the morning preparations as she answered to my opinion.

“The money problem is a major one. But I, Monica, am willing to work without wages, I won’t abandon you like those other bitches out there. It’s fine if you praise me more, you know?”

“You… can’t even move if you don’t get Mana from me, right…”

Our usual morning conversations ended, and I washed my face, and accepted a towel from her.

Outside the window, the morning sun was quite pretty.

A large number of boats were lined at the harbor, and a magnificent view spread out.

“Now then, once we get back, it will get bust again.”

Novem's case, and Septem, and Jewels…

There's quite a bit going on, but can't fixate myself on those for now.

(I'll have to learn a lot of things. And I'll ask Novem once I learn them… there are plenty of things to do until then.)

1 - Dangerous Individual

“Poppycock! What is the meaning of all this!?”

… A wide room.

It was the wide workroom of the head of the Trēs Trading Company, 【Fidel Trēs】. Light poured in from a large window, and many extravagant furnishings were displayed about.

Dabbling in maritime trade, and other such transactions, the Trēs Trading Company was one of the prominent mercantile houses of Beim. Fidel was a representative in the city’s merchant council, and one of the most influential traders in the city.

Such a man crushed a report in his hand, as he glared at the thirty-year-old man before his eyes.

The man gave an excuse.

“I-I apologize! But thinking guards would be essential, I appointed them of my own accord. And in all actuality, according to those who’ve come from Cartaffs, the Trident Serpent was subjugated, and milady’s cargo was intact, so…”

“I didn’t ask for your excuses! Just what sort of man did you put aboard Vera’s ship!? Just look at this! That princess of Lorphys has completely lost her backbone, has she not!? And then Zayin! The Holy Maiden, and former Holy Maiden… relations with not one, but both of them!”

The reason for Fidel’s rage was quite simple. On his daughter Vera’s ship rode an adventurer, while whose skill was assured, was a known womanizer.

He wanted to get this time’s transaction to succeed no matter what.

And that’s why he had sent his daughter, but up to that point, the only thing he had heard from his men, was that they had hired a talented adventurer for the job.

After they encountered the Trident Serpent, and the stories of its defeat spread through Beim, he became interested in that adventurer's identity.

It would be a good idea to make a long-term contract with them, and more importantly, he was the savior of his beloved daughter's life. As busy as he was, Fidel couldn't see his daughters too often, but he did still treasure them quite a bit.

And upon investigating that savior, he was definitely amazing.

To an extent it could be called a blessing they were able to hire them.

But to Fidel, an unbelievable truth had come to light in those documents.

He had ended up letting a shady adventurer he shouldn't have on his daughter's ship. He was filled with regret.

"T-this man, isn't it likely he has a dubious Skill to ensnare women!? My daughter… what are you going to do if he ends up laying hands on Vera!?"

On Fidel's rage, the man who'd hired Lyle's party looked confused.

"S-still, he has a high evaluation from the Guild, and when it came to the job…"

"Like I care about that! He's a damn womanizer! Without digging deeper into the Guild, how can you say for sure!? Kuh… Vera's body is in danger, is it not!?"

The man looked at Fidel, a little fed-up. He could be respected when it came to work, but when his daughter was involved, he couldn't help but be prone to excessive worrying.

For that sake, he had properly put assigned guards to Vera, and his other daughter,【Gina Trēs】.

The man recalled that fact.

"Please calm down, Fidel-sama. Around Lady Vera are those robust

sailors. To them, she is a goddess of fortune. They would never let a man get close to her so easily. And above the sea is their domain."

Even so, Fidel looked anxious.

He rustled up his black swept-back hair, spread out the document he had crumpled, and reconfirmed the details.

"I-it's true that Vera is adored by the sailors. Our luck was off this time, but she's my adorable daughter, loved by the sea… a single adventurer whelp would never be able to ensnare her…"

But Fidel thought.

(Since he came to Beim, he's had a high request completion rate, and he's even gotten involved in Labyrinth Subjugation. There's no doubt he's proficient. I did hear he played mercenary in Zayin, but the result was the best he could have hoped for. Still, the amount of beauts waiting on him… as I thought, should I should I get the Guild to look into is? Someone with this sort of troublesome Skill should be extinguished and confined at an early stage. Right. This isn't because Vera is in danger. It's for the sake of the world!)

Giving an excuse to himself, Fidel decided to move around a few pieces before Vera's return.

Beim's Guild was under the management of the merchants.

If a merchant of his level called out, there were many who would move.

Straightening out his hair, Fidel crushed the report into a ball, and tossed it into a trash can. He lightly traced a finger down his prided moustache.

"… We'll go out to meet them when they arrive at the port. And prepare some skilled folks. I've got to prepare another reward too."

This time's results held a large meaning to the man. The Vera Trēs couldn't even be sunken by the Trident Serpent.

He couldn't say it was she ship's contribution that defeated it, but you never knew what would happen as sea. Make others believe in

your luck, and that was enough to increase the number of those that would leave their cargo to you.

When the goods arrived safely, more people would use the service.

The man nodded with a serious face, and left the room.

Before restarting his work, Fidel wrote up a letter to the Guild.

“Hmmph! Famous noble son or not, get close to my Vera, and I’ll have you disappear. If you’ve laid a hand on her, then…”

With a dark smile on his face, he finished the letter, and returned to his work…

❼

… Tanya received a summons from the Guild management under her Tahnia name.

Along with her superior, she had been called to the main branch.

Both of them looked perplexed at the executive’s impatient expression.

“From your eyes, what sort of person is this Lyle Walt? You can tell he’s a skilled one just from looking at the reports. But how do you judge his nature?”

In an uneasy main branch, what’s more, in front of its top brass, Tahnia felt lost.

“He is a skilled adventurer, and I can’t say there are any problems with his personality. We’re having him take on as many requests as he can manage, and this time around, he has even gone to subjugate a Land Dragon in…”

“Not that. Next. What do you think?”

The executive sought out her boss’s opinion. Tahnia thought she had conversed with enough people at the counter to be a good judge of character, so she was more fit for the question.

But as outranked as she was here, she kept her mouth closed.

“Even if you ask me… I have nothing more to say than what’s written on the reports. Has there been some sort of problem?”

The executive made a face as if it were something hard to say, and presented a single envelope.

Seeing the name on the cover, Tahnia’s boss opened his eyes wide.

“One of the representatives of Beim… Fidel Trēs’s letter has stated their concern, and called him out by name, so here we are.”

Hearing that name, Tahnia felt like pressing her face to her hand. She endured it, and remained expressionless, but in her head…

(What the hell are you doing, Lyle-kun. That isn’t someone you should be making an enemy of.)

Skilled, but an adventurer with a screw or two blown out. That was the current general evaluation of Lyle.

Because there was no way someone leading a mere hundred men would openly pick a fight with an entire country, small country as it may be. He was becoming something of a living legend, and even in Beim, there were some moved to probe into his situation.

Many were surprised to see him continued on as an adventurer in Beim without entering government in Zayin.

(Is he going to do something again?)

A nervous Tahnia heard some words from the executive’s mouth.

“Have you heard anything of that Lyle-kun using any Skills that effect the psyche? It seems he’s always surrounded by woman, more so, he leads a standard harem party, doesn’t he? If he’s harmless, we won’t view him as a problem, but, well…”

The Guild wasn’t run by fools. They kept tabs on adventurers with such doubts, and this was Beim… their headquarters even known as the Capital of Adventurers.

They had such countermeasures prepared.

Tahnia's superior spoke with a serious expression.

"It has been confirmed he uses multiple Skills. If I recall correctly, he has a Support Class blue gem on his person. It's a fact that most mind control Skills are part of Support. Understood, I'll start looking into it right away."

"I'm thankful for your understanding. We can't conclude anything yet. Once he's done with the Land Dragon, and has returned to port, send someone out. Headquarters will also dispatch some personnel."

(Psychological Skills are definitely dangerous, but as long as you have a level of resistance… no, with Lyle-kun's level of ability, half-baked adventurers wouldn't be able to put up a fight. As a possibility, it's plenty possible. It is, but… I really don't think he's that sort of kid.)

Tahnia felt things were getting a little complicated…

❼

"… What?"

The Vera Trēs departed, and I was invited to Vera-san's stateroom.

With a reddened face, she cast her eyes down, and grasped both my hands…

"A-as I was ssaying… I admit my defeat."

Even thought I knew she wasn't looking at my face, I shook my head.

"Nononono! What's the meaning of this!? What is it supposed to mean!? Didn't she outright say she wasn't going to fall!? You… Vera said she had someone she liked, didn't she!?"

In my confusion, I sought some help from the ancestors in the Jewel.

This time, we had a woman- Milleia-san- with us, so I was sure they would be reliable.

But the Fourth was just as confused.

『Oy! Someone explain this situation to me! I haven't the slightest clue! Just what sort of magic did you use, Lyle! No, mr. lyle!』

I'm definitely smacking that man someday. Or so I pledged to my heart, as I ignored the useless Fourth's opinion, and waited for the other ancestors' take.

The Third was definitely giving a wide grin. That's what his voice led me to believe.

『Hmhmm, as I thought. You sure play dirty, mr. lyle. I mean, if you tell someone not to think of you, humans end up thinking an excessive amount… and she was relatively accepting, so I saw this development coming a mile away.』

If you saw it coming, couldn't you have given me some advice beforehand? Just what can I say to reject her? I frantically thought.

There, the Seventh laughed.

『Hahaha, isn't that nice, Lyle? Now you've got your funding in the bag.』

It's true she may provide support on a monetary front. But what sort of person would that make me? Or so I questioned myself.

(I-it's no good. Going out with her for her money is… a-and I have everyone! I have to take responsibility for them!)

As Vera looked down, red to her ears, I tried to say something. The moment I was about to turn her down, Milleia-san's advice came from the Jewel.

『Oh my, these sorts of things really are exhilarating. I wonder what Lyle will say to accept it.』

The Fifth sighed.

『So accepting it is a given? It's certainly a saving grace financially, but… Lyle, what do you plan to do?』

Hearing that, I shook my head. There, Milleia-san…

『After she's resolved herself so much to confess, you'd actually think to decline? And you're the one who confessed first, Lyle!』

(I know! I definitely confessed! But that was something else, right!? The girl herself even said she understood I was just in high spirits at the time!)

And as I took a stance to refuse once more, the Third gave his proposal.

『Lyle, a child this strong-willed wrung out her courage to confess, you know? And do you hate Vera-chan?』

I shook my head to deny that one.

『Then all's well. Whether it be eight or nine, it's but a trivial problem at this point. Let's sacrifice Lyle's future to get some funds. Once this is all over, you just have to work hard to curry favor with your wife/ves. Max… the Fourth happens to be an expert on the matter.』

The Fourth sounded a little displeased.

『I'm definitely better at it than the other heads. But please don't make it sound like that's all I have to me. And Lyle! Haven't you been treating me terribly lately?』

I wanted to tell him to think of the reason himself, but for now, I didn't know what to say to Vera-san anymore.

There, raising her face, she…

"I-I like you. I love you."

From the Jewel, I heard Milleia-san cry out.

『Kyaaaah, it's fine for the girl to confess too!』

I felt the Fifth was a little taken aback.

『R-really? Personally, this development is so sudden, I've no idea what to say… even so, mr. lyle is amazing. If he seriously predicted all this, color me impressed. At the same time, I'd like it if base-state

Lyle worked a little bit harder at it.』

I was sure he was just saying whatever he wanted. But such a serious confession deserved a serious response.

“I’m happy. I’m thankful, but…”

As I was about to continue, the door burst open with good momentum, and the sailors flooded in. The things in their hands went ‘Bang!’ ‘Bang!’, with the sound of gunpowder igniting.

They wore pointed hats, and I could smell black powder around. But those weren’t guns. They were crackers… for parties.

Something Monica carried around.

“Congratulations, milady!”
“If it’s Mr. Lyle, we can rest at ease!”
“I’m sure the boss will be delighted as well!”

As the sailors gave their blessings, Vera’s eyes swam, and she clung onto me. And entering after the sailors, were the rest of my party.

Monica wore a pointed hat, and pulled an extra-large cracker. After a large sound, small, slender scraps of paper flew around.

“Y-you guys…!”

I wanted to complain to Monica, when Novem broke into applause.

“I think she is a wonderful woman. Certainly worthy of Lyle-sama. I’m sure she will help out your cause.”

“I-I see?”

As Novem’s approval troubled me, I remembered the talk with Septem-san.

(Novem is a goddess… no, an evil god, was it? Is that why she pushes woman onto me like this?)

And while that was happening, Eva and Clara entered the room. They glared at one another.

“And I’m telling you, this happening would make a better story if it came right after defeating Tressy! And the finer details are fine! Even if you try to pass it down, it’s impossible for this sort of thing!”

“No, that’s no good! I cannot accept it! Just how he got her to fall should be properly investigated, and left in records! Making it a story, and leaving a misunderstood legend is unforgivable!”

Aria looked at the strife of the two.

“Those two again… and wait, Lyle. You really are indiscriminate.”

When Aria called me indiscriminate, Miranda offered an amendment.

“He turned down Lorphys’ princess, didn’t he? Does that mean he has some sort of criteria? You know, those Walt House Precepts, or something?”

May looked at me and Vera.

“… Hey, no matter how you look at it, Lyle’s the one being supported here, but is that really alright? In the wild, males make harems because they’re strong, but… when it comes to humans, money is more important, isn’t it?”

Seeing May learning about human society, the Fifth in the Jewel…

『May, you sure are clever. In my time, I tried to keep you out of it as much as I could, but… you’ve grown, May. 』

To a delighted Fifth, Milleia-san spoke with a sigh.

『Father, you’re the same as always.』

Monica left the room, and came back with food. Alongside that, she carried glasses and ale.

“Oy!”

Monica was expressionless.

“No matter how many women you get, my master is the Chicken Dickwad alone. Even if I, Monica, may hate it in my heart, there’s no way I can be unprepared! Now, the preparations for a toast are

complete!”

With that pointed hat of hers, and all the party goods she had brought along, she hadn’t a fragment of persuasive power.

(She’s definitely enjoying this.)

The sailors.

“How considerate.”’
“Yep, at times like these, you’ve got to drink. Oh, right, if you’ve got work to do after this, keep it to one glass.”
“Okay, I’ll pop open my special wine today! To our goddess of fortune!’

Both me and Vera were bewildered.

And peeking her head through the doorway ever-so-slightly, Shannon offered a word.

“So this woman was also easy.”

She said that, so in my head…

(You’re one to talk, Shanneasy!)

I ended up thinking that.

2 - Vera’s Ship Log?

… The×th of ○.

Arrived in Cartaffs.

Clear skies.

Sent Lyle’s party off, and safely delivered cargo.

Complete repair of the ship will likely be impossible until we return to Beim. But temporary measures should be able to get us there without a problem. Just in case, we’re taking less cargo than usual.

… The △th of ○.

Third day since arrival in Cartaffs.

Cloudy. The sea is somewhat stormy.

It seems Lyle’s party has become famous at Cartaffs’ Guild. On top of that, even after I told him so many times not to settle for Tressy’s materials, he wouldn’t listen, and it seems they didn’t sell at all.

Having accepted a Magic Stone of this size and purity, I feel a little bad.

I really must think of something to give him as a bonus.

… The ○th of ○.

A week since arrival in Cartaffs.

Raining.

The sea is rough, and some ships aren’t reaching port. Many merchants are looking worried.

While that was happening, the Guild and merchants came forward with proposals for the Magic Stone we had gotten our hands on.

We plan to bring it back to Beim, so I politely declined.

Heard from Guild personnel that Lyle's party had set out to slay the Land Dragon.

… The ∇^{th} of ○.

Still raining.

The ship's temporary repairs finished, and it's taking time to alter our load to take to Beim.

The probability of the merchant ships that haven't reached port sinking is exceedingly high. Many merchants are holding their heads.

In that dark atmosphere, I handed a letter for my father to a ship set for Beim.

… It's around the time for Lyle's party to be fighting the Land Dragon. According to the rumors, it wasn't as dangerous as Tressy, but it wasn't a foe to underestimate.

I pray for their safety.

… The $\blacktriangle^{th}$ of ○.

The captain told me I'm, 'sighing a lot lately'.

'Are you thinking of the boss?' he said with a grin, and when I denied it in embarrassment, the sailors all laughed.

I can't accept this.

When he gets back, I'm going to complain to him.

Oh right, today was sunny.

… The $\square^{th}$ of ○.

Lyle's party isn't coming back.

They were supposed to be here yesterday or today. At soonest. Unable to calm down, I paced through the ship, and the sailors sent glances at me with grins on their faces.

After giving them some strong kicks to the rear, I felt a little relieved,

and returned to my room.

I'm making sure not to think about him, but whether I be asleep or awake, Lyle's face keeps coming up.

… My chest hurts even more than when I'm thinking about Roland.

Today was cloudy.

… The ◇th of ○.

I heard at the Guild that Lyle's party would be at the port soon.

When lying on my bed, I end up touching my lips a lot.

Touching my collarbone makes me remember that day.

This is bad. Really bad. A Guild receptionist handed over some parcels to deliver to the Guild in Beim, but I forgot to negotiate, and accepted them at the proposed rate.

It's a disgrace.

… The ◆th of ○.

Lyle's party completed their request, and returned to the ship.

When I asked, I learned there were actually four Land Dragons… I have henceforth sworn to be harsher on Cartaffs' Guild.

Even though we met up after so long, I couldn't see the face of the man in question.

Clara told me what had been going on lately, but it seems with everything going on, Lyle had more things to think about.

More importantly, when she saw my face, Novem gave a meaningful smile. When I asked Clara about it, she said it meant she had given her approval.

Is Novem the one managing the female fighting force?

Is it best I check with her first before trying to kiss him?

The dark ship's interior.

I glanced through the ship log I had found in Vera-san's room, and flipped through as I felt I had seen something I shouldn't have.

The later ones didn't have the slightest bit of info on the weather, or the ship.

(I read it on the Third's words, but…)

Turning, I saw Vera-san lying on her bed. Around, Shannon was asleep with a blanket wrapped around her, while Aria and Eva were sleeping, tangled up on the sofa.

Monica had finished cleaning up after the party, and she stood asleep in 'Sleep Mode.'

Novem and Clara were also snuggled up with a blanket around them.

The waves were calm, and it was a beautiful night by the light of the full moon. The moonlight pouring in through the window let me read the log.

When Miranda changed her posture, I instantly left the book on the desk, and distanced myself.

If she opened her eyes, and woke, what situation would I find myself in? After confirming no one was awake, I pat my chest in relief.

There…

"Iss Fwedwicks~"

When I heard some sleep talk like that, May fell off of Vera's bed.

(So she was sleeping in such a place… I never noticed.)

Vera slowly raised her torso. When her sleepy eyes met mine, she looked behind me, and opened her eyes wide.

Her violet eyes, behind me… at the ship long on the desk's bookstand.

The Third laughed.

『Ah, it's upside-down.』

He said, as he enjoyed the situation. As I noticed the letters on the log were upside-down, Milleia-san spoke.

『Lyle, looking at other people's diaries is rude.』

I wanted to tell her it was too late for that, but I felt she said that knowing all too well. Miranda and Shannon's ancestor. There's no doubt she had a scheming part to her.

"D-did you see?"

At her strained voice, and her expression on the verge of tears, I didn't know how to respond.

(W-what do I do!? I'm sure denying it here won't work. But reading someone's diary is a horrible thing to do and… right! I can use this to make myself seem like a horrible person!)

I took a deep breath, and put out some theatrical lines.

"I-isn't it best we don't hide anything from one another? I wanted to know everything about you."

Inside.

(How's that? What thinks you of this selfish narcissist!? She's sure to draw back!)

As I thought that the ancestors in the Jewel plus one extra splendidly…

『Uwah, terrible.』

『Were you trying to imitate mr. lyle? I don't think that's something that can be imitated, you know.』

『They're both Lyle, but there's something different here.』

『You stuttered at the start, Lyle. That's no good. Maintain a level head at all times.』

『Really? I think he was trying quite hard there. I hope it goes well, Lyle.』

(So Milleia-san noticed. No, the Third did too… dammit, each and every one of them… I can only think they're having fun watching my plans play out.)

And when I looked to Vera, she was looking down, and stroking her hair. And as she shook her black hair, the room looked brighter than it had been before.

I think my eyes were getting used to it.

Vera stood, and approached me. If she was going to slap me, I would accept it. I prepared myself, as I recalled the Sixth growing ragged from the consecutive slaps of his mother.

(I-it shouldn't be as bad as that!)

I was ready for it. And Vera came closer…

"I-it was a promise, after all. That if I recognized my defeat, I'd do this."

Vera embraced me, and pressed her modest chest against my body. When I was about to step back, a loud voice came from the Jewel.

『Don't retreat! Gently hold her in your arms, Lyle!』

As excited as she was, I was more certain than ever Milleia-san had a terrible personality. Thinking the Sixth was definitely deceived, I followed her words, and held her.

Held her, and…

(Horsefeathers! With this flow, what comes next is…!)

… I was kissed. Just like that. Her tongue entered my mouth, and when she parted, her saliva formed a slight thread. That string instantly disappeared, but Vera…

"Um, if there's something I can do, just say it. Even if moving the Trēs Trading Company is impossible, if it's just a little, I can provide some aid."

The Third spoke.

『A supported man; Lyle sure is amazing. A rich girl of Beim fell so easily… now then, how much should we wring out of her?』

The Fourth's voice sounded delighted. Likely because money was involved.

『Two or three thousand, perhaps? It may even be possible she has five thousand on her. I can't wait for what's to come!』

These guys… I always think it, but they're the worst.

There, still absentmindedly holding onto Vera, I looked around the room. It was dark. But I could see sixteen eyes looking at me.

It was scary. I felt honest-to-goodness fear at the spectacle.

(… I'm already full of regret for increasing the number of girls. So please don't look at me with those eyes!)

❼

The next day.

In Vera's stateroom, I sat across from her on the sofa.

Novem said we should properly explain our own situation. And that if Vera didn't have the resolve to go on, she should pull back.

(She won't say something like that sooner?)

I thought, but I gradually explained the circumstances to Vera.

About Celes…

About Bahnseim…

And about my objective…

With these meager numbers we were picking a fight with the superpower that was Bahnseim. Vera listened with a serious expression, as she touched a hand to her lips in thought.

Sipping the tea that had been put out, Vera spoke.

“I never thought it would come to that. Normally, I’d never believe it. Psychological Skills are truly troublesome, but Charm Skills are ones with flaws. There are times where the user, or perhaps the Skill itself is amazing, but in most cases, they don’t have prolonged effects. If they did, there’s no way those around would just leave them be, after all.”

A psychological Skill… that’s how Vera classified Celes’ charm.

To clear up the misunderstanding, I spoke.

“While she may be my younger sister, we can’t say for certain hers is a charm Skill. Because there are other peculiar things she’s been able to do. But because of that, Bahnseim has begun to go mad.”

The tragedies of Bahnseim brought about by that girl were still going on at this very moment.

And I didn’t know if it was really just a powerful charm Skill.

(If there was someone who knew what it was, it would have to be Novem, or Septem-san.)

Vera rested her elbow on the armrest, and tilted her body towards it a bit.

“Very well. If that’s the case, I’ll sponsor you. I’m sure you’ll need money. Of course, once we return, we’ll have to talk to father. When it comes to work, he’s the type that’s severe, even when it comes to his daughter. If he thinks there’s no chance at all, he’s the type that would calmly hand you over to Celes, Lyle.”

Hearing that, Novem smiled.

“Then we’ve got some ideas of our own. It’s impossible for us to be handed over so easily.”

Seeing Novem so brimming with confidence, Vera nodded.

“I’ll bet. We won’t want any war with a party that took down the Trident Serpent. We’ll surely suffer casualty on our side. But negotiation will be impossible unless you can convince father you have a chance at victory. And I’m not sure I should be the one saying

it, but the prominent merchants of Beim… won't move if there's no profit to be had."

From the Jewel.

The Fourth opened his mouth to affirm that.

『Naturally. It's the merchant's way not to move if there's no profit in it. At times, there are merchants who will move irrelevant to that, though. For them to bet not on Celes, but Lyle, we'll need a considerable chance of success.』

Vera finished her cup of tea, and Monica prepared a new one. Accepting it, she put it to her mouth once more.

"I also get your reason for challenging a country as large as Bahnseim. But to be quite blunt, the way things are going, you'll make an enemy of Beim as well. No matter how dangerous Celes may be, witnessing that danger firsthand, and feeling it on your skin are different things altogether. There are folks out there who can think of any number of means to make up with and join her side."

Novem seemed to be of the same opinion.

That's why we had chosen the house to seek aid from. Carefully going through them, the Trēs house was the most influential candidate.

"I think so as well. That's precisely why I ask. How the Trēs House… no, how Lyle-sama can gain Beim's support."

Vera put the teacup down, leaned her back on the sofa, and looked up at the ceiling.

It was either difficult to do, or difficult to say. But when she turned her face to us, she began talking about what we could do to get aid.

"Beim is the city of adventurers and merchants. But in truth, the adventurers' Guild can't go against the Merchant Council… well, that's just the popular name, but they can't go against the decision of the merchants who go by that name. Just getting the Trēs House alone won't work. At the very least, you'll need five or six merchants

to recognize you, or…”

I need only get them to recognize me? When I thought it wouldn’t be that hard, I heard the Fifth’s voice from the Jewel.

『Getting so many merchants to support you, is it? That’s a hard one.』

As if to explain it out, Vera spoke.

“It’s no simple matter, you know? If we make a move, there are sure to be those following behind and watching. And there will surely be those who wish to join Celes’ side. To profit from a war, there will even be those who will put up a nice face to both sides.”

Novem asked Vera. She made it sound simple.

In that state of affairs, how could I gather support.

“What does Lyle-sama need to gain aid from a large number of merchants?”

Vera spoke with a smile.

“That would be profit for Beim. In all actuality, when all the rumors of Celes Walt get to Beim, there won’t be a single soul who won’t think of her as dangerous. But it’s a merchant’s job to try and reap profit, even from such a villain. That’s why, Lyle… for a while, it’s best you don’t speak about your objective.”

It wasn’t the time to move yet. Hearing that, I could agree. Gathering supporters in Beim was an important task for someone without money like me.

When I nodded, Vera let out a sigh.

“Now then, with that out of the way, let’s talk about how much money I can put out. As things are at present, I doubt you can do much, but I’ll offer up my own free money. You don’t have to pay it back, but I definitely won’t let your forget this debt.”

When she gave the smile of a mischievous child, I nodded with my own smile.

“I’m very thankful. I’ll never forget it.”

“… That fact you can say something like that so lightly… perhaps there’s some of your high-tension side in the normal you. Well, whatever. The amount I can put out is…”

In the Jewel, the ancestors were cheery.

Especially the Fourth.

『How much is it!? If it’s five thousand, we can solve our present issues!』

The Seventh sounded fed-up.

『No matter how great a merchant’s daughter she may be, she’s still a child. I really wonder about putting such expectations onto her.』

With a certain level of funding, on top of this time’s reward, it would get quite a bit easier.

As I thought that, Vera put some unbelievable words to mouth.

“… About a hundred thousand in gold coins. Does that sound alright? I wasn’t really using it, so it’s been building up. That’s all I can do for you right now, Lyle.”

My smile froze. Novem beside me, hearing that…

“With that much, we can put Professor Damien’s plans into effect. We won’t be troubled with funding for the time being. Isn’t that nice, Lyle-sama?”

I let out a dry laugh.

“R-right. Aha ahahaha. Yep, it’s a huge help!”

I replied with a smile. Vera’s face turned a little red, as she averted her eyes.

“I-I can only do this much, but… perhaps I could introduce some craftsmen? But they’re affiliated with the Trēs Trading Company, and I’ve no idea if they’ll take up my personal requests.”

As it felt like everything had just gone and resolved itself, the Fifth quietly…

『… I do think it's a bad idea to leave Beim alone.』

The Third as well.

『It looks like there's an urgent need to decide Lyle's policy. Based on how things go, it'll become a big deal if we don't get Beim under control.』

With all seriousness, he gave me a warning.

3 - Skill

We were on the way to Beim.

Today, I had come inside of the Jewel.

Alongside Milleia-san, into my own… no, the room I that should really be called the Jewel's room of memories.

Rounding the door, as expected, I found the city of long, long ago. Calmer than last time, I was able to take a good, hard look around, and I noticed there was a very slight number of humans still working around.

The earth golems did the work, and at times, people would support.

But a large majority did nothing, drinking the sun away, and gambling their change.

In the very center of that large city, a humble estate that could be balled a mismatch. Surrounded by lines of splendid structures, it was as if that plot of land alone was a scene of the countryside.

Around it, there was a yard, and even a field.

As we walked, I could hear the voices of the people.

"For goddess' sake, that magic old maid sure is stubborn. We should just get rid of that hut already, and have someone build a castle over it."
"It really does drop the dignity of the city. I heard the old folks went to complain to her, but that's the only thing she wouldn't yield on. Even when building a castle would let us hold our heads high to other countries, you know."
"With her magic, she could go clap clap, and have one done any minute. She's at that age already."

Those young men raising mocking laughter were drinking so early in the morning. Their table was lined with cards, and silver coins were scattered around.

The clothes they wore… were well tailored. Their skin was also well looked after, and it seems they were paying some mind to their hair. Some women were wearing dress-like outfits, and leading around a golem to carry out shopping.

They loaded the golem with their loads of groceries, as they talked amongst themselves.

“Hey, isn’t this dress nice?”
“It sure is. That one’s made of precious materials, isn’t it? They should just make more, I say.”
“Don’t have the land to grow it. That’s what papa says.”
“Then we need only take it. From the neighboring country or something. Just have the golems crush them. Do that, and we’ll have tons of material! See, all our problems solved right there!”

If you looked at the scene alone, it was a charming image, but I couldn’t smile at the contents. Can’t laugh at a country that was invaded and destroyed for a reason like that.

But after thinking a bit…

“No, I’m not much different.”

As I muttered that, Milleia-san walking ahead turned around.

『Oh, something on your mind?』

Her expression somewhat felt as if it was seeing through me. Upon seeing this scene, of what I thought, and when I felt. It felt as if it was going directly to her.

“There’s no way I’d think nothing after seeing this scenery. I thought the Magician’s Village was a smaller-scale cautionary tale-like story.”

The fact that a single magician could manage a city so large was a fact I found quite scary.

Are none of the surrounding people thinking about that problem?

“… Why is it that these people aren’t thinking of what would come after the magician Septem-san died?”

Milleia-san started walking. And she looked a little upwards.

『Perhaps they thought someone would do something about it? Well, this is a case where you could call out both parties. Septem-sama lent out her powers to help the town's residents without limit. The inhabitants accepted it without complaint, and they kept getting more people who couldn't do anything at all.』

The more I heard, the less I saw any salvation for the tale.

From my point of view, I felt they should have a bit more of a sense of crisis. But perhaps the people who lived in the time wouldn't have understood that?

We walked through the scenes of memories, and arrived at our destination. The golems cleared the way, and welcomed us to pass.

There were various golem of all shapes and sizes, and they were restlessly working in the estate. Maintaining the lawn, cleaning, and policing.

This manor held too few living souls.

When we approached Septem-san's room, the door was open.

『Oh my, it looks like you'll get to see an interesting memory.』

Saying that, Milleia-san entered the room. Before a bedridden Septem-san, three visitors had come. They were all old men. A considerably plump old man spoke…

『We've too little material to match the demand for cloth. We need to send more golems over.』

Hearing that, Septem-san spoke.

『… I'm sorry. But any more is impossible. My power isn't what it used to be.』

A tall, thin man went on.

『You're not even maintaining the city's facilities properly these days. It's quite troubling. Please get a hold on yourself.』

The third one, a relatively solidly built old man.

『More importantly, how goes the matter of finding a successor? It's right time you prepare the next magician, or we will be troubled.』

The old men mouthed off their complaints to Septem-san, who couldn't move from the bed. And once they were done with that, they moved to leave the room.

『You're in the way, move!』

One of them glared at me, and shouted for me to get out of the doorway. As I stoo surprised, perhaps it irritated him, as he pushed me out of the way.

"How… this is a room of memories, so shouldn't they all be mere visions?"

The one to answer my question was Septem-san.

She raised the upper half of her body, and looked my way with a smile.

『That's, you see, on top of writing down its records, the Jewel is calculating everything. If these were the people that had been recorded, then surely this is how they would react. Their actions, should be like this… and like that, it continues calculating it all. Long, long ago… the ancients had made plenty of tools that far surpassed a Jewel in that regard.』

"In calculation?"

While I wasn't able to fully understand it, Milleia-san prepared two chairs. After sitting in one, she pointed for me to seat myself in the other.

And after I sat, I listened to what Septem-san had to say.

『Last time, I explained I was the one who made the Jewel, did i? And about Novem and the others… then what should I tell you today?』

Milleia-san, in regards to Septem-san's worry.

『Well then, Septem-sama. How about the Jewel's original use?』

『Ah, that one's important.』

Nodding, Septem-san opened up her right hand, and manifested three gems. Blue, red, yellow, the three color of gems shimmered, and she held them up to me.

『Lyle, what do you think Skills originally were?』

Hearing that, I…

"… A weapon held by humans to oppose monsters? In order for humans to fight against evil, the seventh goddess granted them magic and Skills, or so I heard."

Hearing that, she nodded, but made a troubled smile.

『Right. There was that as well. Well then, why do you think it's only one Skill per person?』

"… Because mastering but a single Skill could take a lifetime?"

Septep-san shook her head.

『That's wrong. It's because for a single person, one type is the limit. Normally, a Skill will even change the body makeup of the one who uses it. To make it easier for you to understand, it makes the human themselves into a sort of Magic Tool.』

Hearing that, I tilted my head.

"To such an extent?"

『There are many Skills out there, but their original number was much lower. Body strengthening is a good example. If it comes out in Support Class, it can come out in Vanguard as well. But there are vague differences in effect, right?』

Well when you mention it, it's true the distinction between the three classes of Skills can become quite vague.

『Let's say there were three people. Even if they all awoke to the same Skill, the effects will never be the same. The reason being that

humans have individual differences. Those differences can't help but show themselves, making it so the Skill isn't used to its utmost potential. Though there are times they can contrarily pull out more power from it.』

Body attributes. People with large muscle mass, and little would have different effects.

Someone with abundant stamina, and someone without would have different usage periods. The quality and quantity of the mana expended when using a Skill all depended on personal traits.

『Shall we make it even simpler? There are individual differences in mana as well. Attribute magic… there are the five elements, two divine, right? That's the same. A person may be good at fire attribute magic, and bad in water. There can be someone with loads of mana, at a low quality, while there can be someone with high-quality yet scarce mana. When Skills use an individual's mana as a driving force, there's no way it wouldn't be effected by it.』

I could nod at that explanation, but at the same time, a question formed. In that case, if I or another used other Skills, wouldn't a problem come out?

"Um, then why is it that I can use the Skills of the heads of history? Based on what you're saying, I don't have a body adapted to their Skills, so I shouldn't be able to handle them."

Septem-san looked at the three colored gems floating about her palm.

『What made that possible was Magic Tools. No, the gems I developed. With all those traits to consider, I couldn't help but split them into three. These are devices that support Skill use. Each one has Skills it's best suited to support. And from there, the divisions of Vanguard, Rearguard, and Support come out. They influence their surroundings, so your ancestors all manifested support Skills, though. And because of the strong influence they have on their user's body, they can't help but have a bad affinity with Magic Tools.』

Okay, I see why holding a gem made it so you couldn't use Magic Tools. To support its wielder, it brought about large interference, hindering the activation of a magic tool's Skills.

After hearing this and that, I sought confirmation.

"Um, the one who granted Skills was the seventh goddess, right? She granted humans magic and Skills?"

Septem-san nodded, but she said it was wrong.

『What I… no, what the real Septem granted was the use of mana to humans. And what has been produced from using that mana was magic and Skills. Originally, neither magic nor Skills had any form. So Septem only helped shape them to an extent. Otherwise, she thought humans would have no way to go against the monsters and Labyrinths.』

"… You're in the Jewel Celes holds too, aren't you? Agrissa holds your memories, doesn't she? Then why has Celes become like that?"

I can't see the Septem-san before my eyes as the same Septem-san influencing Celes. No, I thought they were surely different, but I couldn't see how they were *this* different.

If someone like her was recorded in her Jewel, would Celes have become so bad?

『… Agrissa has only a little bit of Septem's memories. But in exchange, she inherited ours quite strongly. The Septem before her, and the Septem before that. We all inherited Septem… the one called a goddess' deep memories of regret. But Agrissa is different. I'm sure she only ever saw our treatment… the parts of us being oppressed by humanity.』

I tried asking.

"Why do you serve them to such an extent? To be blunt, you're spoiling them too much, aren't you?"

When I said that, Milleia-san glared at me.

And…

『Lyle, you're going too far.』

But Septem-san smiled.

『It's fine, Milleia. Lyle, perhaps you're kind in the truest sense of the word. Right, what I am doing is self-satisfaction. Deep regret and irritation that isn't even my own has driven me to live as I have. So I serve them. I can't help but see humans as fragile beings. And I can't help but love them…』

That's what it meant to carry on Septem's memories. Or so Septem-san said.

She looked over me with a gentle smile.

『Lyle, perhaps Septem's memories were lost in Agrissa's generation. Nihil put a stop to her memory's inheritance quite a long time ago. Trēs and the others are the same. I'd feel sorry if I was the only one causing you trouble. So I'm going to teach you a bit. Before that…』

Septem-san erased two of the three gems, leaving only the blue one behind. When she handed it to me, it sunk into my hand, and disappeared.

As I was surprised, Septem-san looked at me with a serious expression.

『… Perhaps you truly do have fate with the goddesses. Be careful of Ūnus and Duo's descendants. Quīnque as well. I don't know why, but you're drawing the goddesses' descendants to you, Lyle. You've got some fate in store.』

"… No, um, I'm sorry. Could you please forget my past, 'I must be loved by the goddesses' line, and wait, how do you know about that? By Trēs, you couldn't mean…"

Septem's face was still serious, but after a while of silence…

『Oh right, you did say something like that. But there's no mistaking it, right? Novem, Nihil, Trēs, Quattuor… you've pulled those girls'

descendants to you. And Lyle?』

What does this mean? As I thought that, Septem-san looked over me with a gentle smile.

“What could it be?”

『It will soon come the time for you to face yourself. The half sealed by Celes is already trying to awaken.』

I had absolutely no idea what she was trying to say.

❼

… At Beim’s port, stood the figure of a man in a suit waiting for the Vera Trēs’ scheduled arrival.

He wore a specially-tailored overcoat, and around him, his guards were standing lined up.

With long straight red hair, a calm-looking girl with drooping eyes asked her father Fidel.

“It sure is rare for you to come out and meet my sister, father.”

“Really? I just had the time today. I wanted to spend some time with the three of us together as a family.”

Fidel sent a smile at his daughter, but looking over them was a nervous man in a robe.

Sticky from the port’s sea breeze.

With the sun beating down on him… he wanted to cast away his robe, and hit the bar. The man complained in his heart.

(Goddammit, I wasn’t free, yet this is why the rich are… my son and or daughter’s being deceived by a bad person. It’s a common request, but it’s usually a misunderstanding. Even if they’re charmed by Skills, it’s usually because the individual had a chink in their armor. It’ll wear off in a while regardless.)

The man was an adventurer dispatched by the Guild. An adventurer able to determine whether someone was using Skills, and determine what Skills they were using.

He held an identification Skill, and had an exclusive contract with the Guild, with a handsome income. But he was beginning to grieve over the fact he never got anything but these pointless requests.

(Don't think psychological Skills are omnipotent. Why do I have to throw away my vacation to see if a rich girl is being tricked by a man? And even when you tell these guys there's no Skill at play, they usually don't believe it. Goddammiiiiiiit, I never should've contracted to the Guild!)

He held an identification Skill, and placed in the right situation, he was a priceless treasure. Those able to determine Skills like him were indispensable existences to the Guild.

But as the Guild's position was weak to the merchants in this city, it couldn't be helped there was an influx of this sort of request.

What's more, the client was one of the prominent merchants of Beim. Even if the adventurer reported the truth, if the man didn't like it, his complaints would make things quite troublesome. It would become harder to live in Beim.

(And wait, this is the second time for the Trēs House. They had me look into whether there were any Skills at place last time… and he complained last time regardless.)

The robed man was robed in this hot weather so as not to show his own appearance.

He wore a mask, as he took some glances at the young man standing nearby the red haired【Gina Trēs】.

His hair was short and brown, and he was an amiable-looking young man in his early twenties. His name was【Roland】.

An earnest lad who had worked at the Trēs Trading Company from a young age. Yet an information dealer had to thoroughly investigate him, and the robed man had to ascertain his Skills.

Fidel glared at Roland, before looking to the sea.

(Well, I get that it's love across rank. But those two look quite good together.)

Roland was making a troubled face. Gina called over to him.

And it seems Fidel didn't like that one bit.

(Before his daughter took a liking to him, he treated him quite favorably… why do father have to be so… oh, the boat's here.)

A lump of metal approached the harbor, and perhaps from battle, it was quite beaten up. But as it came in, with the rumors it had taken down the Trident Serpent, there were some officials waving their hands, and some rubberneckers gathering.

Once the ship was at the pier, the sailors began their work.

With the ship's owner watching them come in, their movements were different. They looked overly delighted, as they looked towards Fidel, and waved.

(Well, they returned after defeating a big-shot. Of course they'd be merry.)

The robed man waited for the party in question to disembark. A gangway was attached, and the ship started unloading its cargo.

And after the sailors descended, a little while passed before a large number of women came down. They looked like adventurers, but it was a typical harem party.

(Well, guess I'll get to work.)

Fidel glared at the adventurers, and the robed man looked at the most-likely candidate, the man standing at the center.

And he opened his eyes wide.

(W-what's with these girls? And that blue haired guy at the center… he's no ordinary one. N-no, more importantly my job… among his Skills, a psychological one… it's there! It's really there!)

The man panicked as he searched out the Trēs House's daughter. He found her walking alongside Lyle towards them. With her parasol in one hand, her other hand was grasping the man… Lyle's hand.

But from her behavior, it was clear she was putting quite a bit of effort into doing so.

(Her face is the same as the other female adventurers supporting that delicate man! There's no doubt about it! And his Skills are… ah, he isn't using them. Never mind.)

The robed man shook his head, and Fidel's face turned bright red. He gave a series of gestures to tell him to look properly.

But no matter how many times the robed man checked, he wasn't using Skills.

After shaking his head a few more time, Lyle's party finally reached Fidel's side.

The robed man looked at Lyle.

(… Could it be this guy is maintaining a harem party without Skills? Hah, that's actually worthy of admiration. But no way daddy over there's going to believe it.)

The robed man shrugged.

The man leading around those fair female adventurers gripped the daughter's hand, and appeared before the parent.

What's more, Lyle's first utterance was…

"U-um… father in law?"

"I don't want to be called father-in-law by you!"

He chose his words as if purposely trying to strike a nerve…

4 - The Ancestors + α's Plan

The Ancestors + α's Plan

『For the sake of what's to come, I was thinking we should fight Beim's merchant and Guild to an extent.』

With a serious expression, putting his elbows on the round table, and using both his hands to cover his mouth, the Third sent a look around the gathered members.

Inside the Jewel. Me and the ancestors sat around the conference room. The Fifth alone was sitting on the table, lending his chair to Milleia-san.

Everyone around nodded with serious faces, but I looked around doubtfully.

"And how do you really feel?"

There, the Third gave a light, 'Oh? You noticed?' in a frivolous manner. The Fourth let his glasses catch the light, and let his lips curl like a crescent moon.

『Beim is too dangerous. Even if she be the daughter of a prominent merchant, they very fact she can put out a hundred thousand gold is abnormal. So for the sake of the future, how about you make a long-term promise. Wouldn't that make *your* future easier to manage, Lyle?』

… Meaning these people think it's natural that Beim is going to assist us. But to regulate what comes after that, they're thinking of putting some pressure down.

"… Even when we don't know if we'll win or not, should you really be trying so hard to make enemies?"

As I felt tired, Milleia-san smiled and spoke.

『Oh, isn't it fine Lyle? You can't go underestimating merchants. If

they felt like it, they're in a position where they could kneel before a noble, with a weapon concealed in their suit ready to kill them any time.』

The Seventh shared Milleia-san's opinion.

『It's not like they're all that sort of merchant, but when interest grows too big for you to control, it's only left to be snatched up. Lyle, this is for your sake. No, for the continent's sake as well.』

The Fifth looked up at the ceiling.

『Don't underestimate merchants or money. You don't want them taking control of the continent behind your back. But it's natural that we'll win. And so has come the time where we decide what to aim for in our victory.』

I stared at Milleia-san's smile, as I thought…

(She told me to call Vera's father father-in-law, but I see it was to fan the flames… each and every one of them…)

… But even if I say that, I received Vera's support, and was in a state where I could already make another move. And for out next actions, we would have to have a clear picture of our future standings.

"What my position will be in the future, was it?"

The Seventh nodded with a serious face.

『That's right. It's not as if all's well as long as you win. You've got the lives of at least nine wives on your shoulders. And going further, there's the fate of those who choose to follow you. I definitely won't forgive you dying a hero's death. What we're assisting you with is fighting, and living through it all. And that's what you've decided. Throw away any foolish desires for heroism.』

The Third looked at me, as he leaned his back into his chair, and put his hands on the armrests.

『Well, even if you win, it wouldn't be strange if you're killed for being of the same Walt house. It's true that Celes is the Walt House's sin.

But we won't recognize this journey if it leads to your death. If you're to die, then Lyle… to be blunt, I don't care if the continent goes through its long era of chaos.』

The Fourth used a finger to push up his glasses, corrected their position, and straightened his back.

『So even if you win, quite a few things will be affected by your position. What sort of victory do you long for? Is it possible? And where should you aim for the future? To change the phrasing, do you want to stand at the lead to destroy Bahnseim, or do you want to put someone else at the lead to destroy Bahnseim.』

Milleia-san brought it together.

Laughing to herself, and using a hand to cover her mouth.

『It's pretty much whether you'll become king or not. Do you want to aim for prime minister? Or do you want to reclaim the Walt House's territory? Even if you call it kingship, based on how you choose to rule, the position's name will change though.』

Should I reclaim the territory I was supposed to succeed?

Or dig deep into the center of the country?

Stand at the head, and become king?

The Fifth looked at me with a serious expression.

『I won't tell you to decide right now, but you'd better decided it soon. Because of Vera, we'll be able to move sooner than anticipated. Unless you decide your future standing, we won't be able to decide to what extent we should go against the Guild and the merchants.』

The Third clapped his hands. He clapped them twice, and gave a smile as if to blow away the dark atmosphere all at once.

『Well, right now's the stage to prepare this and that. From here on, you can make as many revisions as you want. So think about it. And fire up father-in-law Fidel some more. It seems his daughter is his weakness.』

To a delighted Third, the Fifth…

『Daughters are ones that will be sent off one day. What is he thinking, doting on her to such an extent?』

A dry opinion as always. But Milleia-san looked on it quite pleasantly.

『Father sure is awkward.』

It seems that's how she took it.

❼

The day after returning to Beim.

After returning from the journey, I had fallen asleep right after returning to the mansion. But once I awoke, I was called by Adele-san…

"What is this supposed to be?"

In a room with a heaping mountain of documents, I stood before an Adele-san on the verge of tears, and yawned.

It wasn't that my fatigue wasn't going away. I'd been spending some fulfilling days lately, and from it came a sense of tiredness.

With much to think of, the matter with the Trēs Trading Company was going to make things busy again.

But Adele-san…

"They're documents from Zayin and Lorphys! Why are they piling up like this!? What did you do, Mr. Lyle!?"

Behind Adele-san, Makzim-san stood nervously. I'll bet he wanted to console her, but the words weren't coming out.

I picked a paper off the mountain, and confirmed its contents.

"… Why is this form here? This is completely irrelevant to me."

There, the Fourth gave some advice.

『Hmm. They either want to borrow your processing power, and request work, or they want to show off the fact you still have a connection to them… Well, that Adele kid looks overly earnest, and she's properly working, so they just kept sending them one after the next. Even so, there's a dubiously large number of documents.』

So that's how it is? I thought as I addressed Adele-san.

"Isn't it because you're dealing with them so earnestly that they keep coming in? In the first place, it isn't my job, so you could have just sent them back, you know."

There, Adele-san unsteadily collapsed onto the floor.

"T-that can't be~."

"M-miladdyyyyy!! Please wait right there. I'll prepare some cake for you at once. It's delicious cake, you know! Cake!"

Maksim called out the name of Adele-san's, somehow getting her to stop crying. With tears still in the corners of her eyes, she endured the urge to cry, and was about to complain to me, but…

"Lyle! Is it true that you managed to get research funds!?"

… The door slammed open with good momentum, and toppling the document pile over with the wind, Damien entered the room.

With a smile, he led his three Automatons.

"Ah, master is smiling like a young boy… This scene shall be preserved in my memory banks for all eternity."
"With this, we can purchase the machinery we wanted, master."
"mr. lyle, good job."

No. 3's comment irritated me a bit, but I ignored it. Generally, just like Monica, they showed little interest in anything besides Damien.

If you asked, they would do work but the effort they put in when it came to Damien was on another level altogether.

There, with a tray in one hand, with cake and drinks on top, Monica made her appearance.

“Lowly mass-produced rejects. Acting all cutesy without doing any work… Chicken Dickwad, you must be glad you got a maid as capable at work as I. Monica. Lucky bastard.”

Placing a drink and cake in front of Adele-san, she handed me a drink as well.

With teary eyes as she violently shoveled the cake into her mouth, Adele-san looked quite mortified.

“… It’s delicious.”

As she said that. And Maksim-san looked over her and smiled. His face was flushed, and I felt as if I had just seen something I shouldn’t have.

“Milady as she eats cake is lovely as well.”

Turning my attention to the drink, I dealt with Damien.

“Now then, Lyle. How much funding were you able to pull out of them? You got at least fifty thousand, right?”

To a thrilled Damien, I delivered the honest truth.

“It’s not as if we’ve officially received aid from the Trading Company, but we’ve got an individual’s support of one hundred thousand. Please prepare a list of machinery you’ll need. And please keep the estimate at fifty thousand.”

The plan to revive Monica’s sisters as golems.

That included, we’d have to put Damien to work.

(I’ll have to consult with Vera, and see if we can get the machinery for cheap. And see if she can introduce some craftsmen.)

There, the automatons…

“Cheapo mr. lyle.”
“Just how much do you think master was looking forward to his new equipment?”
“Cheapskate. mr. lyle, you cheapskate!”

The three automatons spoke to tease me. There, Monica took in both her hands, a drill even more splendid than that one she held before.

“I won’t permit any insult to my Chicken Dickwad! I’m the only one allowed to insult him!”

(… I don’t want you to insult me either.)

Letting off a low vibrating sound from the spinning drill in her hands, Monica glared at the three automaton units. And the three of them took out their various weapons, and prepared themselves.

But Damien was…

“Fifty thousand, is it… then this and that and that too… ah, but if I don’t have that one, I won’t be able to research that…”

He had already begun scribbling down a list of things to buy. What’s more, on the back of one of the official documents scattered over the place.

Adele looked like she wanted to say something, but stopped. Perhaps she understood it was pointless to say anything to Damien.

And finishing her cake, she put her drink to her mouth, as she…

“Mr. Lyle, may I say something?”

“Yes?”

“You’ve done splendid work this time. You’ve earned up a considerable sum, and we won’t be troubled with life for a while. But thinking towards taking Celes down, there can’t help but be a problem of finances. For an individual, a hundred thousand is an extraordinary sum. But for a country…”

Right. To take on a country, a hundred thousand gold coins wasn’t enough. Even more so when we were dealing with the superpower of Bahnseim.

“I know that. Luckily, I was able to raise my name on the way. The merchants should be trying even harder to get an exclusive contract

with us. I hope our financial troubles will be solved in the near… ah, that's no good."

Maksim-san standing behind Adele-san.

"What do you mean no good? The rumors have even spread in Beim. The Trident Serpent, was it? I do think the merchants will want to sign contracts with you."

Right.

After taking down such a big shot. Our evaluation had risen even higher, and the sum we'd get from a contract surely jumped up.

But even that wasn't enough. And according to the ancestors' plan…

"No, how should I put it… I kinda have to make an enemy of the merchants and guilds once, so…"

Taken aback, Adele-san dropped the cup in her hands. With that as a signal, the automatons glaring at one another got to work.

They promptly took out their cleaning implements, and began cleaning up the mountain of papers. What's more, the four of them worked together to clean the room.

"Ah, I'll take care of that one."
"Then leave this stack to me."
"Very well, then I this one."
"Then I, **Special Model** Monica shall take care of this area."

(Could it be these girls actually do get along?)

"… What are you talking about, Mr. Lyle?"

"No, please, just call me Lyle. I'd prefer it if you dropped the honorific."

Breathing out a sigh, I began worrying over what was to come.

❼

… The Trēs Trading Company.

“That fiend! Drawing financial support from my Vera, what is the meaning of thisss!!”

A worked up Fidel raised a loud voice as the family ate its breakfast together.

Vera quietly continued with her meal, While Gina called her boyfriend Roland over to the table. Fidel would usually try to drive him away, but having heard Vera’s story, he didn’t have the time to pay mind to Roland.

Gina used this opportunity to hear Roland’s impression on the food.

“How is today’s breakfast, Roland?”
“Yes, well… it’s quite delightful. Lady Gina.”

Hearing that, Vera chewed on a piece of bread, as she spoke.

“Just talk normally. You usually don’t have honorifics between one another, right?”

With a cold sweat, and a bitter smile, Roland seemed mindful of Fidel. But Fidel’s attention wasn’t anywhere near Roland.

“Vera! Your father has no intentions of recognizing such a man! Even if he saved your life, was recognized by the sailors, is an amazingly skilled adventurer, and is a former high-ranking noble… dammmmn, he’s perfect!!”

It seems Fidel was in conflict with the part of him that wasn’t a father.

Of all else, Lyle was an excellent asset. Even if he was a known womanizer, there wasn’t a single rumor of him treating them badly. Marrying his daughter, and forming a business relationship wasn’t a bad thing, or so his merchant parts whispered to him.

And Fidel the father was giving some strong opposition.

Vera ate her meal, as she spoke to Gina.

“What? So do you two eat together every morning?”

Gina averted her eyes a bit, in embarrassment.

“Well… yes. I’m trying to get him to recognize us.”

Inside her head, Vera.

(I think you’re having the opposite effect there. Well, even if he hates it, keep showing up as a family, and maybe father will compromise eventually.)

Vera and Gina often received marriage proposals. Because they were the daughters of a prominent merchant, even in Beim.

But Fidel didn’t let those sorts approach his daughters at all.

She thought it was excessive care, but Vera had noticed it was also to raise her and her sister’s value, and irritate the surroundings.

(My father the merchant, and my father the father, is it. Parents sure have it hard.)

Thinking of it as someone else’s problem, Vera looked at Fidel.

“Dammitttt! Who was it!? Who was it that said the sailors wouldn’t let anyone lay a finger on Vera!? Getting the sailors’ approval, that just has to be a Skill!”

Vera sighed.

“And I told you it wasn’t, didn’t I? Just finish your meal already. You’re going to be busy today, aren’t you? I’m also busy.”

“S-sorry. Did you have plans today?”

After Fidel calmed down considerably, Vera spoke.

“Yes, Lyle’s coming over.”

On her words, Fidel flew into a rage once more…

5 - Guild Personnel

Having dropped by the Trēs House, I was sipping tea in Vera's room.

The mansion was extravagant, and even with Beim's high population density, they had a vast yard surrounding it. What's more, it wasn't in a bad location like that mansion I'd bought.

In such a location, with all the conditions gathered together, a mansion that looked like overkill had been set up.

And if you were to ask what I was doing in Vera's room…

"The items on this list? Let's see. We could likely get them together ourselves, but they're specialized tools, so it may be best to buy them all together at another shop. Because if you're buying all this together, they'd usually give a discount. I'll prepare a letter of introduction, so go buy them with Professor Damien."

The memo Damien had scribbled out was re-written for readability's sake, and I handed it to Vera.

"So buying them all at once is more beneficial?"

"With the Trēs Trading Company, we don't deal in such specialized tools. We may have one or two in stock, but rather than purchasing them one by one, it's to your benefit to buy them together. You can go there next time you want to buy something too. A shop that sells this sort would be…"

According to my consultation with Vera, if I wanted to buy the implements Damien requested, I would have to go there.

"It's my loss. You've memorized all that?"

As she looked as if she remembered all the merchants and shops in Beim, I said that, and she laughed.

"Of course not. There aren't too many specialists in this sort of machinery or equipments. It's not like I know each and every door."

She explained, as she began writing up a letter of recommendation. The Trēs House's name was quite effective in Beim.

I heard the Fourth's voice from the Jewel.

『Lyle, have her introduce a variety of craftsmen. Like some dealing in rare metal.』

The golems Damien was producing… dubbed the【Valkyries】by the man, had their skeletal frame parts incorporate rare metal, it seems.

But for the processing, and property selections of the metal, we would need the power of a specialized craftsman. So we would need an introduction so such a craftsman as well.

"While we're at it, do you know any good craftsmen for processing rare metal? More than that, you know anyone who could work with Tressy's materials? According to Damien, they were considerably amazing."

When he saw Tressy's materials, Damien said they contained some superior metals. But we had not the tools to process them, nor the acquaintances who could.

Vera sat on the sofa, and touched her hand to her chin, looking down a little.

"They're mainly unknown rare metal, and never-before-seen materials, right? I'm sure there are quite a few craftsmen in Beim who could work with them, but before that… an experienced one who knows not the impossible. If you ask if I know one, then I do, but he's quite stubborn. Perhaps you could negotiate with metals he'd never usually get to put his hands on?"

I was thinking the same. Collecting up the metal was going to take time. It would also cost money, so I wanted to use as much of Tressy's leftover materials as I could.

"I did have that on mind. But it seems Damien is more fixated on those materials than I had anticipated. Saying they'll be put to good use in his own research."

Perhaps Vera found it funny, as she laughed.

“There’s no helping researchers and craftsmen. They should learn to compromise. I got it. I’ll put in a word. But even if you can meet him with me, he’s a craftsmen who sometimes even declines my father’s requests.”

“Is he that amazing?”

The fact there was a craftsman who would decline the requests of the Trēs House’s head surprised me.

But I could nod to the story.

“He’s a dwarf. They’re long lived, and it seems he’s been our exclusive merchant for a long time. Even in my grandfather’s time, we weren’t able to go against him too strongly. The important parts of the Vera Trēs were made by that dwarf.”

(I guess I’ll try meeting them. If it’s no good, I’ll move on.)

And as I continued talking with Vera like that, a knock resounded through the room. The one to enter was Vera’s younger sister Gina.

With red hair, she was, unlike Vera, abundant… in chest.

“Vera, there’s something I’d like to… oh my.”

“What?”

As Vera took a discontent sip of tea, Gina-san looked at me with a bit of a troubled expression.

“T-the truth is… it’s about Roland.”

If I recall correctly, that’s the name of Vera’s first love. And at present, he was younger sister’s lover, it seems.

The Seventh let out a dubious voice from the Jewel.

『What could it be. You know… once you know this and that, it makes you want to tell the girl to make a better choice of people to consult her problems with.』

Milleia-san sounded delighted.

『Using these sorts of tactics… these muddy affairs sure are interesting. Even in the Walt house, there was a time where an elder and younger sister of mine were contesting over a single man, you know. In the end, the one who got the guy was a completely irrelevant younger sister, though. 』

The Fifth sounded surprised.

『… I never heard anything like that. Something like that happened?』

Vera sighed, stood, and apologized to me.

“Sorry. It looks like that’s all for today.”

I also stood.

“No, I’m glad we could talk of all that we did. I really apologize I was almost all my own matters.”

“That’s fine. And accept the present later. I told them to hand it to you.”

In truth, it had mostly been about me. A fun conversation with Vera only took ten minutes or so up of the two hours.

The Fourth, in regards to that.

『You were so terrible before, even this is an improvement.』

Milleia-san, hearing that.

『So you were even more terrible before. I’d have liked to have seen that.』

(… Where is the kind young sister the Sixth was always talking about? That was definitely a lie.)

❼

… Once Lyle had left the mansion, Vera went to Gina’s room.

She sat on her sofa, the two facing one another.

A strong light poured into the room, but everywhere it didn't hit was quite dark.

Vera lowered her voice a bit.

"You don't have to be so wary of us. Lyle has no intention of taking over the Trēs House."

No intentions to take over. But Lyle had told her personally. That for the sake of the future, he was thinking of placing some regulations on Beim.

(If someone else said it, I'd wonder what they were even talking about. That sort of talk.)

Hearing that, Gina twitched in response, and after a while, she opened her mouth.

"Um, I'm sure you understand this, but an adventurer succeeding the Trēs House is a bit… even if you don't have such intentions…"

Hearing Gina's piece, Vera inferred the general just of it.

(Seeing as I'm not marrying a suitor chosen by father, she came to assure her position in the house. She's also quite wary of Lyle.)

She knew Gina was moving to officially take Roland as a groom.

And in truth, Vera had always known Gina was the sort to make these sorts of calculated moves. And Gina knew full that Vera herself was in love with Roland.

She knew, and that's why she moved first to start going out with him.

"Father doesn't intend to let me succeed either. And it really doesn't matter who does. What's more, I haven't the mind yet to lay hands on the Trēs House's money. That was all my own funds."

Gina seemed to be worried about whether Vera would become engrossed in Lyle, and eat away at the House's assets.

"But would you usually go that far?"

And she surely had a side that cared for her elder sister. But to Vera, that was only a hindrance.

“… Gina, I won’t get in the way of you and Roland. If you want to succeed the Trēs House, then go and do it already. So please don’t get in the way of me and Lyle. I won’t cause you any trouble.”

(For now.)

Or so she thought in her heart…

❼

Leaving Vera’s mansion, I showed my face at the East Branch for the first in a long time.

I had planned to go there from the start, but when I went in, I felt the surrounding stares. I had felt them since I returned to Beim, but as I thought, I stood out.

The low voices.

“Oy, it’s the Holy Knight.”
“Huh? Don’t you mean Knight of Love?”
“It’s that, ain’t it? Not just the Holy Maiden, he got a princess to fall too, or something…”

Hearing the adventurers’ voices, I felt some resentment at the fact most of my rumors were growing terrible.

There, I saw a familiar group.

It was Erhart’s party.

The Third in the Jewel was a little surprised.

『Oh, almost didn’t recognize him there.』

The Third’s surprise wasn’t misplaced. After all, while his tank top showed no alteration, his other equipment had become complete.

While it did feel he was the only one fully equipped, his other

comrades were wearing the brand-new equipment of novice adventurers.

He was standing in Marianne-san's line, keeping relatively quiet. He stood alongside another, as his other companions were on standby in a corner of the lobby.

There, noticing me, Erhart thrust out his finger.

"Ah, you're…!"

I thought he had become a bit more decent, but it seems his insides hadn't changed all that much. Deceived by his appearance, I had come under the impression he had matured.

"Long time no see. You doing well?"

When I dealt with him with a smile, he was as brimming with vigor as always. He was glaring my way, but his comrade grabbed his shoulder, letting him regain his composure.

"Hah! You've gotten just a little bit famous, but we'll catch up to you in no time. No, we'll pass you by before you know it!"

He was belligerent, but it doesn't look like he would try to come at me or anything.

(What's this? Even this miniscule change makes me feel he's grown. Maybe it's because I saw that adventurer of Cartaffs, but this guy is starting to look decent.)

"I'm counting on it."

I said, as I started up the stairs. Perhaps Erhart's turn in line came, as he went over to the receptionist Marianne-san with his head held high, and started up a conversation.

Seeing him like that, I gave a bitter smile, but just a bit…

(Huh? Why does Marianne-san look a little sad?)

… I ended up thinking that.

❼

The Guild's third floor.

When I went to individually check with a receptionist on my future requests, I found Tanya-san at the desk.

Black bob-cut, bespectacled with the air of a capable woman, she conversed with me, and helped me think over my future objectives as an adventurer.

With the East Branch being a dispatch-type Guild, quite an amount of time was needed for each request. So if you wanted to make money, it would be quite difficult.

But adventurers recognized by a branch could, like this, be introduced to requests of high difficulty, and favorable profits.

Tanya-san confirmed the request I had chosen.

"Very well, so you wish to complete this one next. While you're at it, could I get you to take care of a cheaper one as well? There are a few on the way."

Saying she wanted me to take care of a few miscellaneous jobs, she let me review the contents.

"This definitely isn't on the way, is it? It's a bit of a detour. Well, not that I mind. I want to participate in the next Labyrinth Subjugation after all."

When I put in a bit of cynicism, Tanya-san gave a wry smile.

"It's because you're a skilled adventurer, Lyle-kun. We'll properly call out to you when the time comes. Come to think of it, Alette-san's party has returned, but have you met up with her yet? Last she came in, she said that her timing was off, and she missed a chance to meet you."

I tilted my head.

Alette Baillet… a female knight even said to be the next vice-captain

of Lorphys' knights. With Lorphys' newly expanded territory, I thought she would be living a life chased by the demons of work.

I couldn't see why she had returned to Beim.

"When her own country is so busy, I'm surprised they could dispatch her back to Beim. I get the feeling their financial situation isn't that bad, you know."

"… I won't ask why you're so knowledgeable on Lorphy's financial affairs. But she's probably here for you, Lyle-kun."

I couldn't see the reason for that either. I looked down a bit in thought.

There, the Seventh spoke.

『I don't think they're trying to make an enemy of us, but could it be enclosure? If they wanted to kill Lyle here, it would become another spark with Zayin. It's hard to think they would work together with Zayin to kill Lyle.』

(TL: Enclosure, as in the process of converting public property into private property)

The Fourth laughed.

『Their country's internal affairs are going right through us! If they came to kill him, I'm sure we could go crush them.』

(How scary. But I can actually think of a number of means.)

Having worked in Zayin, I came to understand quite a few weaknesses of Zayin and Lorphys. Like which locations to attack to give the most possible damage.

(And both places only have one successor at present. Zayin has Thelma-san, but it would be hard for her to make a comeback at this point.)

Tanya-san collected up the documents as she spoke.

"Well, it's not like she's got her eyes on you in a bad sense, so if you find the time, why not try and meet her?"

I nodded, and thought over when to meet her.

It was that moment. I suddenly remembered Marianne-san's saddened face.

"This is a completely different matter, but you know Marianne-san who's in charge of Erhart's party? Did something happen between her and Erhart? She looked a little sad, or how should I put it… just wondering if those guys did anything."

There, Tanya-san looked a little surprised. But it seems something came to mind at once, as she explained it to me.

What she spoke of was likely just what she was permitted to say.

"They've become shockingly more diligent than they started out. They're able to reliably earn high evaluations on odd jobs, after all. Well, I'm telling you because I doubt there will be a problem, but it's getting close to the time for them to graduate."

"Graduate?"

"They've lost the need to have an exclusive receptionist. Of course, from here on, there will be times when she'll deal with them normally. Even so, seeing an adventurer come of age, even a receptionist has some things to think about. And Marianne's an especially kind one."

Graduation.

Compleeting requests, saving money, and getting equipment in order.

Young adventurers who properly prepared, as long as they didn't push themselves, had a high chance of survival.

What's more, Erhart was a Skillholder.

They'd surely be just fine with the monsters around Beim.

"Not to sound rude, but I thought it was something darker than that."

Tanya0san upon hearing that, sharpened her gaze a little.

"… I won't deny the fact there are receptionists like that, but

Marianne isn’t one of them.”

On her words I apologized, and Tanya-san apologized as well. And with the papers all in order, she put them in an envelope, and handed them over to me.

At the end.

“Well, receptionists have a lot going on as well.”

She said that.

6 - Katana

… It was a small village.

But in the past few years, it had begun to grow larger.

Population-wise, its mere three hundred had swelled to four hundred. But even so, it's not like it had a specialty product or anything. That small village was suddenly gained better prospects.

In the past, when the village youth came of age, they'd journey out to the larger cities or Beim, but that had stopped happening in the last few years.

More than that, some of the youths that had gone out were even beginning to return.

In the village, the young men took up weapons to defeat the surrounding monsters for the magic stones, and materials.

Peddlers dropped by it frequently to buy off these spoils of war.

And today as well, a single peddler dropped by the village.

"Whew, for you to even prepare a place for me to stay… it really is a big help you're able to periodically obtain this many magic stones."

The peddler who'd arrived the previous evening stayed a night before buying stones and materials in the village, and selling off his own merchandise.

Once more, this venture had generated a nice profit, and the peddler looked delighted.

"Well that's good. Come again soon. The young'uns are out hunting monsters at the moment, so we might be able to gather them relatively quickly."

A village that had become more profitable than it had been a few years ago. And at present, the man who was the talk of the town was a middle-aged former adventurer who had come back from

Beim.

He was a man the peddler had never even heard rumor of, but when he returned to his homeland, that village had become prosperous.

He had surely taught the young lads how to fight and slay monsters.

The peddler believed so, and held no doubt at the fact.

“Then that’s a life-saver. If you’re defeating the monsters in the area, it makes my travels all the safer, after all.”

The former adventurer man struggled a bit with his enunciation.

“… Right. Well, go back with care.”

The peddler finished his business, and decided to leave. He carefully loaded his wagon with the drops he’s purchased, and planned to set out alongside another group headed for the city.

The ones travelling from village to city were a group of youths.

They weren’t leaving the village itself; it seems they were going out to buy food supplies.

Seeing them, the peddler thought.

(I heard their payments of magic stones and materials have lowered the tax, but are they concentrating on it so much they have to look elsewhere for food? I don’t think the feudal lord would permit it, but…)

Recently, a number of young men walked the town with their weapons. They gave off the impression that they ventured out to find and defeat monsters.

The peddler.

(It couldn’t be that… no, really doubt it. If he’s a former adventurer, then surely he knows the dread of a Labyrinth.)

Could it be the village was hiding a Labyrinth without reporting it? Is that where their profit came from? He thought.

But there were many towns and villages who had fallen to ruin from such an act. With a former-adventurer among them, he didn't think the village would move in such a direction.

And if there really was a Labyrinth, they should be reaping even more magic stones and materials. A village that did something so foolish would surely sell stones and materials in large quantities, and cast suspicion upon itself.

While they were earning a fixed amount, it's not like they were especially profitable or anything.

On top of that, it's not like there weren't any villages like this one out there. Villages that couldn't help but fight large numbers of monsters regularly. There were even villages out there that paid their taxes in magic stones.

It varied greatly by country and lord, but such villages often had to pay a higher tax than others. The weapons they held, and the village produce wouldn't amount to enough. So they hunted.

But pressure from other sides would also be tight. If a war broke out, those sorts of villages were often demanded to send out manpower.

And the peddler was sure the village was one inclined in such a way…

❼

… When the peddler had left, the former adventurer【Burani】called together the village youths.

Not at the plaza, but a space in the corner of the village. Atmosphere-wise, it definitely didn't look like a place for a pleasant talk.

And in truth, the talk they carried out was of dangerous contents.

Burani spoke to the young folk who worked under him.

“Oy. You’re making sure to fight the monsters around the village too, right? If you just keep going into the cave, they’ll be suspicious that the surrounding monster numbers aren’t going down.”

The villagers from their late teens to twenties nodded a number of times. Burani had worked as an adventurer in Beim, and they saw him as a man of valor.

“Boss, we’re properly monster slaying around the village like we agreed on. But if we go in the Labyrinth, won’t we able to get much more than we can around there? Why don’t we do that?”

There, Burani spoke quite fed-up.

“Idiot. That’ll just make people suspicious. Small profits, long term as our policy. I’m sure I already told you we’ll be taking our time milking the Labyrinth. If it looks like we’ll be found out, make it, ‘oh, we just found a labyrinth’. Or otherwise, take it down, and be done with it. Until then, we’ll save up bit by bit.”

The man called Burani. A former adventurer he may be, but in his party he was a baggage carrier, and none too skilled an adventurer at that.

But sad as it may be, he was no fool. He was a little crafty of a man. But at the same time, he wasn’t very clever. His head could turn a bit, and he had just a bit of a good grasp on the essentials. That was Burani.

But the man himself thought he was considerably clever.

While no one would take him seriously in Beim, it was different when he returned home. It it was only the monsters around the village, he could easily take them on.

And deceiving the elders who never went out was also an easy task.

For better or worse, for the youths who had left the village and found success, this little village wasn’t very captivating a place to return.

So there weren’t any adventurers besides him who had come back.

And because of that, there were many villagers to jump onto his

words. There were villagers who opposed, of course, but once their lifestyles had turned abundant, they had changed their hands.

(That's right. Just like this, I'll become famous in the village, and I'll be an object of admiration for the rest of my life. I'll get a wife soon enough. And I'll live a better life than any of those stuck-up adventurers who made a fool of me in Beim.)

A little crafty, and living revered as a warrior, Burani was living his second life in this village.

Oblivious to how foolish a life it was…

❼

"I refuse."

With a stiff white beard, and a body that had only grown sturdier with age, the dwarf craftsman caused me to make quite a troubled face.

I could hear the sound of pounding metal around, as a number of dwarves were busily carrying out their work.

He was the craftsman Vera had introduced, and a capable talent who could work on almost all forms of rare metal.

But when I tried asking at his workplace, and had only spoken a little, he cut it short.

Vera, who had come with me, looked just as troubled.

"Letarta, I'd like to make this request as well."

There, the craftsman【Letarta】took a huff of his pipe.

"Yes, it's a request from the young lady. I'd like to hear it out, but it's not happening. That Fidel whelp came by, you see. He said I definitely couldn't lend a hand. I've know the kid a long time. And the one who helped me out was your great grandfather, you know? I think I've more than worked off my debt at this point."

The stubborn-looking old man looked at me with lazy eyes. And seeing the sabre hung at my waste, he shook his head.

“Bro, unlike that whelp, I don’t really care whether or not you’re worthy of the young lady. But listen here, if you’re that skilled, you should properly choose out your weapons.”

It seems he had determined I had a level of skill. And he could instantly see through the fact that my current sabre was just a cheap mass-produced one.

He was definitely competent.

But stubborn.

“Can’t you do something about it? It’s a metal no one has ever worked before. So I wanted to make the request to you, a leading craftsmen, even in Beim.”

There, the old man laughed.

“Well it looks like this old codgers got quite a high evaluation. I’m happy they’re looking at my skill, and I agree that it’s an appealing proposal. But no.”

Vera sounded a little angry.

“Why!? If it’s because of father, you don’t have to care about him. He’s just pouting a bit right now, and trying to make Lyle’s life difficult.”

Hearing that old Letarta laughed. And spoke as if to admonish Vera.

“Then you’d best get him out of it. I’m sorry, but I’m actually quite busy right now. By the way… my current job is fixing up your ship.”

Vera dropped her shoulders, apologized, and stood at a stalemate. It didn’t look like negotiations would get any further. The only thing I could think of way trying to persuade Vera’s father Fidel-san.

Old Letarta, who smiled as he looked at Vera, took a glance at me.

“Well, I’ll at least show your boyfriend my merchandise. I’ve got weapons much better than what he’s got at his waist. So work hard,

and persuade that whelp.”

A man even Vera couldn’t persuade. There was no doubt he was a famous talent of Beim. Even in the dwarven race with its abundance of blacksmiths, he was skilled enough to raise his name.

I wanted his assistance by all means.

There…

“Dad, there’s a customer at the store. Seems they want to see sabres.”

When a dwarf woman came into the workshop, Letarta-san made a stiff face.

“You… I said anyone could man the desk, couldn’t I? Now look here, just have the grandson deal with it. This sort of thing’s a good experience.”

There, the dwarf woman slapped his shoulder.

“Oh shut it! That very grandchild is troubled, so go and help out, is what I’m trying to say! You’re saying you won’t listen to your precious daughter’s son’s request!?”

Perhaps flustered by his daughter’s rage, Letarta-san cleared his throat, and stood.

“I-I understand. Good grief… where did I go wrong in raising her. Sorry, young lady. I have to see a customer. Look through my wares all you want. I’ll throw in a discount.”

Old Letarta left the workshop with his daughter, while we left out back, circled around, and entered the store-front part of the building.

It was surrounded by other blacksmitheries, but the biggest building around was old Letarta’s shop.

He did take on large jobs, but like this, he made crafts of his own, and sold them as well.

With numerous pupils, his successor, the son-in-law shop manager, and a grandson in training… The store was managed by three

generations.

When we entered through the front door, old Letarta, who'd looked grumpy before called out in a loud voice.

"Oh that's no good! Then I'll have to prepare a splendid sabre for your beloved. It isn't a bad idea to buy mass-produced ones enmasse, but when it really comes down to it, you'll need a reliable weapon!"

He was delightedly dealing with a customer. And looking at the counter, I saw the backs of two I have become quite accustomed to.

One with a side-ponytail, and light brown hair.

The other with golden twintails, and a maid uniform.

"What are they doing?"

When I said that, Vera…

"Isn't his attitude a bit too different from before? He looks really, really delighted, doesn't he? He's being even more compliant than when he was dealing with me, isn't he?"

As Vera looked a little dissatisfied, I offered her a smile as I went to meet up with Novem.

"Weren't you going shopping today?"

Both Novem and Monica turned around. And both off them looked a little surprised as they looked at me.

Monica explained the events that had led up to now.

"No, we just happened to run into one another here. Normally, I'd never go shopping with the vixen even if it killed me, but… ah, orders are a different story, you know. I, Monica, am resolved to take the initiative and carry out my Chicken Dickwad's orders no matter how detestable they may be!"

I didn't care about that part, so I looked at Novem. There, she gave a gentle smile.

“I thought to use this opportunity to get you a new sabre, Lyle-sama. Using nothing but mass-produced ones creates quite an expenditure, and more than that, I have my daily feelings of gratitude to you.”

What a good kid. Shannon should just drink down the grime boiled off the bottom of her nails.

But Novem gave an awkward smile.

“Um, it’s just… Monica-san said that instead of a sabre, we should get you a Katana.”

“A what?”

When I tilted my head, Monica worked herself up.

“Yes! As I thought, a katana suits you! Yamato’s soul! A warrior’s soul! No, was it a samurai’s soul? Well, that stuff doesn’t really matter! I’m sure you’ll love it!”

(Who the hell is Yamato? Samurai? Does she mean knight?)

But I didn’t know of the weapon called a katana. To ask what sort of weapon it was, I turned to old Letarta.

“No, your guess is as good as mine. From her explanation, I get that it’s something like a sabre. But you see… if you ask me to make it, it’s not like I couldn’t but I don’t want to sell something incomplete. Please think that it will take some time. More than that, and I’ll be frank, there’s a problem with it as a weapon.”

Hearing about a problem, Vera spoke.

“What? Is its reach too short? Lyle, go make the gun your main. If you use it as a Magic Tool, you’ll get quite an output.”

And I’m troubled because I can’t do that. But from the Jewel, the Seventh agreed.

『As expected of Vera! That’s right, the gun is the weapon that will change the world! Lyle, choose the gun. The sabre is a relic of the past.』

I’ve been swinging that sabre for years and years, you know…

Old Letarta opened his mouth.

“It’s like a sabre. It’s a weapon that can thrust and cut, but in that case, endurance will be a problem. What’s more, it’s even slimmer than a sabre, she says. To be blunt, even most rare metal will be too fragile for that design. It’ll break much too easily. Unless you have some higher-quality rare metal, I can’t say it could be used as a weapon at all. And this all begs a question of why.”

Hearing that, Monica.

“But you can say the same for a sabre, can you not? Now Chicken Dickhead! Take up a katana! It’s alright! The blade’s a bit different, but it’s pretty much the same as a sabre!”

I didn’t know why talks were going this way, and I looked around somewhat bothered.

But when I looked at Novem, old Letarta…

“And wait, you guys were acquaintances? I guess there really are coincidences like this in life. ‘Kay then, got it. While I’m at it. I’ll take the young lady’s request as well. I’m feeling a bit more motivated.”

On his words, Vera looked surprised.

“… Eh?”

Novem looked at us, and inferred what had happened, before giving her thanks to old Letarta.

“Thank you very much.”

“Oh, don’t mind it! Besides, that whelp’s request was a personal one. He’s no right to complain if I prioritize another one over his.”

Novem had always had a tendency to be liked by demi-humans.

(Is this also the goddess’s… no, the evil god’s grace? Well, whatever.)

I rejoiced over the fact I had managed to secure a craftsman, while Vera…

“… What’s this feeling. I can’t accept it. When even I was no good, he accepted it at once with Novem.”

She looked quite unsatisfied.

7 - Damien and Old Letarta

Preparing to depart for the Guild request tomorrow, I listened in on the meeting of Damien and old Letarta, who had dropped by the manor.

I thought it best they get acquainted, but I felt this was a failure. And not in a bad sense.

At the table of the parlor, Damien unraveled the blueprints, and heatedly declared to Letarta.

“As I thought… we need some individuality with these. At this rate, Lyle is going to be stuck with nothing but large racks, so I think this is an important issue. So I want to give some individual differences in each one’s organic body parts.”

As he said that with a serious expression, old man Letarta sighed. And just as I thought of scolding the pervert…

“That one goes without saying. If they all have the same face, it’ll get boring. But the organic parts, was it? That one’s out of my jurisdiction. I’ll make the skeletons however you order, but… will they be covered with organic body all over that?”

(T-that went without saying!?)

“It’s impossible. I can’t help but require some metal parts exposed. Those ancients sure are great. Their automatons completely resemble humans, after all. Well, can’t we make it so their limbs are exchangeable?”

When Damien reluctantly compromised on that, Letarta nodded.

“There’s no helping it. If I get too particular on it, it’ll never be finished in my lifespan. In that case, up to here is…”

As Letarta drew a line across the blueprint, Shannon looked on with interest. While her eyes usually couldn’t see, her taking interest in a sight made me curious, so I tried asking.

“What’s so interesting?”

“Right. It’s interesting because I can see the lines on the prints the maid prepared. I can even see the letters and numbers. The places that have been written over and amended are visible as well, so it’s already nothing but a mess, though.”

Hearing that, I looked at the diagram. On top of the line Letarta drew, Damien crossed another line.

“Can you see what he just added? The line he drew?”

“Nope.”

She gave an immediate response, and it seems the Seventh thought of something.

『Hmm. This may just be… Lyle, was Shannon able to write letters and numbers? No, could she understand them?』

He asked me whether Shannon was able to read or write, so I tapped the Jewel with my fingertip. I showed my denial, so the Seventh spoke quite disappointed.

But it didn’t sound like he had given up.

『Then it’ll take some time, but I guess there’s no helping it. We’ll have to put some time into teaching her.』

(Teach the blind girl how to read?)

I was curious as to what the Seventh was thinking, but seeing the two heating up before me, I became a little anxious.

“So that’ll be like that, and in that case, to make a trial product… the first unit will take two to three months.”

Damien nodded satisfactorily at Letarta’s estimate.

“Looks about right. The price would be… around five thousand in gold? It’s a little over budget, but so be it. After that, we’ll need a series of experiments before we can make the next one.”

Hearing their talk.

“Eh, wait a minute… that’s more than two thousand gold coins over your initial estimate, isn’t it?”

I said that to the two, a cold sweat breaking out on my back. But they were both all smiles.

“Because we don’t yet have an environment where we can get all the factors together. I’ll assist however I can. But it’ll cost you. Even after the preparations to mass produce are in order, it’ll generally take around a thousand per model.”

“What I gave you before was an absolute minimum. If we don’t do this much, we’ll never be able to exceed your expectations. So go do your best collecting up funds again. Meanwhile, I and this craftsmen shall be climbing to greater heights than ever before! Now then, next is about the appearance, but…”

“Since we’re at it, how about being a bit more adventurous? An armored beauty isn’t a bad sight, but I’d like a little more playfulness to it.”

“Playfulness… right! That’s vital!”

Watching them fire up even more, I wiped my sweat, as I worried whether our funds would be enough.

(It’s no good. At this rate, we’re certainly going bankrupt. I can earn an extent with normal requests, but that’s just trickling water on burning coals.)

The guild had recognized me to an extent as an adventurer, and requests of higher difficulty were circulating around to me. At the same time, the rewards were growing higher, but even that wasn’t sufficient money.

“C-could the two be a little more prudent…”

There, Damien turned to me.

“I am. I’ll just thrown this out there, but if I was up to it, the first unit could cost ten thousand gold, you know. Ah, but… since we’re doing it anyways, would that be better? The prototype has got to be the

the dream of all men.”

Old man Letarta shook his head.

“I’ll like the mass produced ones all the same. So what are you going to do about this problem, bro? I won’t say putting in money will guarantee a perfect product, but there’s nothing lost in investing it in.”

I was about to choose the cheaper option, but the Fourth unexpectedly chimed in with a serious voice.

『… Lyle, spend ten thousand here. And have these two write up a contract. The rights to all technology and skills gained here belong to Lyle. You’ll be able to fish Damien along with the next batch of financial aid. For the old man, tell him you’ll get the finest environment together.』

When I thought he was being lenient with money, Milleia-san’s voice came from the Jewel.

『Oh my, grandfather. Did you think of another money-making scheme? You haven’t changed, I see.』

On her delighted voice, the Fourth.

『No shit! Even if there may be a personality problem, the two you have in this room are the best mind and skill you’ll ever find! If you keep them unrestrained, that’s what you can expect to get out of it! … And even if you fail, it wasn’t even your money to start with. We never planned for it, so wasting a bit shouldn’t hurt too much.』

(It isn’t just a bit!)

Right.

It was Vera’s money. So I wanted to value it as much as possible. But it seems the ancestors were agreeing with the Fourth’s opinion.

The Third didn’t sound interested.

『If it’s moneymaking, that’s the Fourth’s job. All his.』

The Fifth uninterested as well.

『Agreed.』

The Seventh alone seemed to see through what the Fourth was thinking.

『Monopolization on the craft… no, you're preparing them to sell. So you want to do what we couldn't do in Arumsaas here? I see. Come to think of it, ten thousand gold isn't something strange. There are plenty of rich folk in Beim.』

I covered my face with my left hand, and spoke to the two of them.

"I'll take the ten thousand gold course. However, all the techniques gained this time around will go to me. I'll pay a considerable recompense for them, though."

There, Damien raised both his hands in joy.

"As expected of Lyle! You really do get it!"

Old man Letarta looked happy as well.

"It's nice how you're not concerned about the money. Looks like I can have fun for once in a long time!"

Seeing them rejoice, I dropped my shoulders, and Shannon called out to me.

"Looks like you have it rough too."

Seeing her touch a hand to her mouth, and laugh at me, I smiled as well.

"From today forth, you're taking reading and writing lessons."

And said that.

"Why!? Don't you feel ashamed, taking it out on a little girl!?"

❼

I left the golem matter to Damien and Letarta, I went down to the information dealer Rauno-san before departing.

As always, I took Miranda along, and as always, we paid the reward to Rauno-san's assistant, Innis the gnome.

In his workroom/bedroom, I accepted a report.

Miranda looked through it.

"You've looked into quite a wide range there. You sure you haven't left anything unchecked?"

Rauno-san waved his left hand with a sleepy look on his face.

"No way in hell. I asked a colleague, and we dug in together. Because business is booming on our side. It's important to send some jobs around so they don't get jealous. Human relations are always a pain, aren't they?"

There, Miranda narrowed her eyes, and smiled.

"If it wasn't for the reason of wanting an easy life, I'd agree with you. Well, as long as the information is accurate, then all's well."

As I read through the papers, my eyes stopped on one of them.

It was of how the expanded Lorphys Kingdom was having problems with its neighboring countries. Galleria and Rusworth were still at each other's throats.

And having newly gained a border with them, it seems Lorphys had yet to figure out how much a distance it should keep with the two of them.

"Send an envoy, and they'll be sent back? No trade either?"

As I was reading through, Rauno-san nodded and explained.

"They've always had that sort of relationship with Beim. Don't get involved with us, if you do, we'll crush you. A similar threat has come from both parties, it seems. Those maidens of war sure do love their war."

On the report was written, that this time both sides had suffered heavy damages. But I got the feeling they were too calm for having one of their neighbors wiped off the map.

(I did consider the possibility of them attacking.)

If they did, the plan was to aid one side in crushing the other, and forming a three-country alliance.

(… Perhaps something is going on.)

With that on my mind, I turned to the next document. It was about Bahnseim. All pieces of info were terrible.

“So Bahnseim’s as bad as ever. No, it’s gradually become worse.”

When I said that, it seems Miranda was interested.

“… Even when Bahnseim’s so chaotic, I don’t see much movement here in Beim.”

Rauno-san gave a grin.

“Well we only think of other countries as business partners over here. More than that, an increase in war means it’s time for the mercenaries to make their bread. And those at the top are only thinking of how to make money, I’m sure.”

It was a country with a civil war waging. I doubt they were doing much to collect magic stones there.

In that case, Bahnseim would have to buy stones from the surrounding nations. But those nations wouldn’t know when to bite into the current Bahnseim, so they wouldn’t trade so easily. In that case, the only place where they could buy them would have to be Beim.

From the Jewel, the Third gave an uninterested murmur.

『Is this that ‘fire on the opposite shore’ thing? More so, they’re thinking of how to use that fire to earn money. From what I see in the info, there are quite a few untrustworthy places, but I guess it can’t be helped.』

(TL: Fire on the opposite shore, it’s in flames, but it’s not your problem.)

Mainly related to Celes.

Meeting her, and being charmed, they had presented everything they had. Besides that, the severety of the slaughter and plunder in the territories that had been attacked.

Even when that information was coming in, it looked like Beim was taking it quite care-free.

“Rauno-san, the information about Celes has reached Beim, right?”

“Yes, it’s reached, but it’s up to the individual to trust it or not. In truth, all war’s a terrible thing. When it sounds so unbelievable, most would believe the report’s wrong. And rumors are things that make it all sound big. Maybe that’s how they think of it. No, how they want to. While I’m at it, Beim has avoided invasions from other countries a number of times. It brags about its ability to do so. There’s a groundwork to make everyone believe they’ll come out fine.”

Even without war, the Guild would surely do whatever it could to gather adventurers. The merchants would make their business partners suffer, and the mercenaries would find work.

Beim really was a troublesome place.

Miranda crossed her legs, as she turned to another report.

“Hey, this country between Beim and Bahnseim… you wrote its movements were strange, but what do you mean by that?”

When her expression turned serious, Rauno-san sounded a little annoyed.

“… A profitable village came out. If that’s all it was, then no one would care, but it seems they’re gathering considerable amounts of magic stones and materials. The village itself’s begun to incline that way. Because Bahnseim’s in turmoil from the internal strife. They’ve raised the amount they’ll pay for magic stones… I thought it suspicious. It could be the case they’re hiding a Labyrinth over there.”

He added on an, ‘but I’m just fantasizing on my own over here,’ in jest, and showed a smile at the end, but it looks like he really did find it fishy.

(Other countries can't interfere there.)

"Can you leak this information?"

There, Rauno-san…

"There's no proof. But from my side, I have sent a message to Beim's VIPs. It was indirectly, but the information has gotten through. But with these sorts of things…"

He looked up at the ceiling.

"… By the time you notice it, it's usually already too late."

❼

… When Lyle had left the information agency, Rauno called Innis in.

And he had her read all the info he had gathered.

"How is it, Innis?"

With her small build, as she sat on the sofa, it looked as if a child was reading papers too difficult to comprehend.

It was quite a cute figure. Her body began letting off a faint light.

Even with the windows closed, the dark room was dimly illuminated. And in the room, Rauno waited for Innis' answer.

The woman called Innis was a Skillholder. What's more, it was a peculiar Skill. It didn't have a second or third stage; it was complete the moment it manifested.

That Skill's name was【Information】.

It examined all know information on hand, and used it to make an accurate prediction of the future. It was a Skill quite like Clara's highest stage, and one of the reasons Rauno had managed to survive as an information dealer all this time.

"… Perhaps they think they're hiding it well, but the probability they are hiding a Labyrinth is exceedingly high. A portion of the materials

flowing out are from a monster never before seen in that area. Perhaps they thought it would be fine because a similar type was around. And there is a possibility the feudal lord has already made amends with them."

Hearing that, Rauno confirmed with her.

"Now then, the situation of the surrounding countries, and of Beim… what will happen, Innis? Will the Labyrinth run out of control?"

On his question, Innis…

"It will go out of control soon with a high probability. An adventurer dispatch will not make it in time. In that case, a large army of monsters will flow into Beim as well."

Rauno, quietly.

"Can it be prevented? How much damage will come to Beim?"

"… The outbreak itself will only have casualties numbering in the few thousands. But the problem is what comes next."

"And what comes next?"

"The probability of surrounding countries collapsing is high. And after that, the probability of Bahnseim gaining control of them is high. Beim will surely be dragged in."

Meaning…

"… So Bahnseim is going to become our next-door neighbor. How troublesome."

Rauno whispered that.

(Now then, how is my client going to move?)

"Innis, how is Lyle's party going to move?"

There, Innis was troubled. She was able to forecast most events with her Skill, but when it came to things pertaining to Lyle, she was off most of the time.

She had tried making predictions based on personality, relations and ability a number of times, but all of them had missed the mark.

“… Uncertain. Insufficient information. Lyle-san’s actions always exceed my anticipations.”

Rauno-san gave a bitter smile.

“Again? Good grief, now this is a client you can’t get tired of.”

Third Generation Head (˚∀˚ヘ): “Innis-chan! Does she properly know of the information that is mr. lyle? That’s the important point! Otherwise, you’d never be able to predict him lol.”

Lyle (#˚Д˚): “… No, this is definitely you guys’ fault! Because you have me do all those things!”

???? |∀・): “But you don’t hate it when they do that, right? You really aren’t honest, man.”

8 - Mrs Milleia

On the way back from clearing the request.

In Porter's loading tray, I absentmindedly stared at the ceiling.

What was requested this time was the subjugation of a Hippogryph. And on the road back, or rather the detour back, I took care of some miscellaneous requests as well.

Also in the load tray, by the light of a lantern, Aria was calculating her profits from this time's rewards on a paper with teary eyes.

Miranda was watching over her, and she was pounding quite a bit of information into Aria, who hadn't experienced the paperwork hell of Zayin.

That promise she made a while ago of teaching her until she was capable of doing it was faithfully being adhered to.

(But why does she look so happy teaching, I wonder. More than that…)

"That's no good, Aria. You've made a mistake. It's a simple calculation error."

She had made a mistake at the beginning, so she would have to redo the whole thing. Hearing that, Aria started up again, and shouted.

"Then couldn't you have told me when I made it!?"

Miranda looked across the wood crate Aria used in place of a desk, and gave a beaming smile.

"Eh? Why? I did say it. That I'd check it when you're finished. I taught you the method, and I never said I'd caution you on the way."

Porter's loading compartment made some light rattling shakes, but that had been reduced quite a bit from before. And in that space, Miranda was having Aria carry out simple calculations.

They were simple, but long, and if one step was wrong, the whole thing would fall through. And Aria was going through an eternal repetition of such a thing.

The contents… with this reward, our net income, as well as how we would divide it amongst ourselves, I guess?

Those terrible with money in this party, starting with Aria, were May and Shannon. Eva had travelled before, so she was surprisingly reliable when it came to funds.

It looks like she went through quite some troubles as a singer.

But she was incapable of paperwork.

Seeing Aria's tears as she looked at Miranda's smile, I thought.

(… Miranda's personality definitely takes after Milleia-san.)

And as I thought that…

『Lyle, you just thought Miranda takes after me, didn't you.』

That voice that sounded as if it just found something to tease me on. I heard Milleia-san's voice from the Jewel.

I was taken aback, but I quietly looked around before rolling the Jewel with my fingertip. I signaled my denial, but Milleia-san sounded convinced.

『Oh, it's alright. Saying I resemble my great granddaughter is something to be happy about. But realizing just how you see me is quite a shock.』

To jump on that train, the Third spoke.

『Ah~ poor Milleia-chan.』

Perhaps the Fourth was bored.

『Now that's just terrible, Lyle.』

But the Fifth and Seventh were on my side. No, perhaps it's best I say they understood Milleia-san's personality.

『Well thinking of how black-hearted you are, there's no helping Lyle thinking that way.』

『The form of aunty faking tears isn't cute in the slightest. Just because you look younger in the Jewel, you think your heart's gotten younger as well? Please stop, it's sending shivers down my spine.』

An impact ran across the Jewel.

(… Eh?)

The Third informed me of the situation. For some reason, his voice was shaking a bit.

『… The Seventh will revive momentarily. Just give him a minute.』

❼

『Now then, Let's go ask Septem-sama some more questions. Last time you heard that she was the one who made the Jewel, and about Skills, right?』

As she directed a smile no different from the usual, I took a few glances at the Seventh as I stood before my door.

He was in his seat, slumped down, and trying to make it so I couldn't see him.

A grinning Third was teasing him.

The Jewel had been nothing but men up to now, but Milleia-san's appearance had changed the atmosphere just a bit.

"What are we going to ask this time?"

She pointed at me.

『About you, Lyle.』

"Me? Isn't that a bit too far from the timeframe Septem-san lived?"

There, Milleia-san gave a good grief, shrugged her shoulders, and shook her head.

『You don’t get it, do you… from the moment it was born, the Jewel was constantly recording surrounding information to memory. And Septem-sama is the memory of the originator of all of this. I’m sure she’ll be able to teach us a bit. And that talk of your other half caught your interest, didn’t it?』

As she sent me a smile, I nodded.

In the past, Septem-san said my sealed half was trying to awaken. And that the time to face it was coming.

I wanted to know just what sort of meaning that held.

『Then let’s go.』

We rounded the door together. But the scene on the other side was different from usual.

It was a large city, but it was as if it was on the decline.

Most of the shops had someone manning the desk, but they didn’t even try to sell the merchandise on display. As people walked passed, they didn’t even try to call out.

The surrounding buildings were in tatters, and not in the process of repairs.

“This is?”

『Oh my, the scenery’s quite terrible today.』

Milleia-san said that as she walked off, and I walked beside her. It was the third time, and I knew where to go, so I didn’t have to follow behind.

Suddenly, a well-dressed man ignored the surroundings, and walked up to us.

I stood in front to cover Milleia-san.

『Well you’re quite a gentleman. Worlds apart from a year ago.』

“… You know about a year ago?”

『I didn't know it a year ago. I said it, right? I was chosen by the Jewel as a guide. If I didn't know this and that, guiding you wouldn't really work out, now would it.』

Her golden eyes looked as if they were looking somewhere far away. And The dressed up man ran into a passerby.

"… What's the meaning of this!? I'm a magician! Trash like you is going to block my way!?"

"P-please forg….

The dressed-up man held his hand up at the man he's run into, and fired magic from it.

"W-wait…"

I was about to leap out, but Milleia-san stopped me.

『Lyle, this is a memory. You can touch them, and get a reaction, but there's nothing that can be changed.』

So the passerby's body was set ablaze.

All those around watched on the scene with fear, but none of them tried to stop the dressed-up man.

『… Let's go.』

Pulled by the hand, I left the scene. A detestable burnt scent filled the air, and the feeling of this death was all too real.

The fact such a scene was unravelling meant this was a memory of the Jewel, right?

❼

We went to Septem-san's room, but it was different from before.

She raised her upper body on the bed, but spider webs were growing in the room, and it wasn't being looked after.

The mansion held no golems, and no humans either.

『Oh, you've come now of all times.』

I didn't know what to say to Septem-san's slightly troubled expression. She looked a little embarrassed, and sorrowful.

She took out a dusty chair, brushed it off with a hand, and prepared one for me and Milleia-san.

And after we sat, I spoke to her.

"Today Milleia-san said to ask about myself… um, what did you mean by my other half?"

A half sealed by Celes.

Those words had been weighing down my mind.

Bathed in a light pouring out of the bed, Septem-san opened her mouth. She looked at the ragged curtain, and looked a little sad.

『Half… that would be your memories, Lyle. You can't remember it, right? Lyle, can you remember what you were like before? And Celes' face… not now, how she was before.』

Milleia-san looked out the window.

『Oh my. Well they look happy.』

I heard the voices of a family outside the window. I hurriedly stood, and went over to it. There, in the shade of a tree, with a sheet spread out under them, was a happy-looking family.

There were guarding knights around, watching over the parents and children.

And the one in the highest spirits was a young boy.

The parents were looking at the child, and a nearby girl was watching him as well… watching her brother.

When I extended a hand to the window, the girl's face turned towards us. But the outside of the window quickly changed back to the mansion's yard.

The memory that had been playing faded out, and even if I opened the window, I couldn't hear a thing.

"What was that memory?"

As I looked confused, Septem-san spoke.

『Why it's your memory, of course. I said it, didn't I… they're already trying to awaken. The reason her surroundings obey her isn't because of her Skill. Lyle, try and remember. Celes' Skill is to take. She took your Mana and experience, and even your parents' love. The memories she couldn't take in the end have been sealed up like this.』

But this was the first I ever heard Cele's Skill was to take something from another. And that what was effecting her surroundings wasn't her Skill.

『If I had to be more precise, Celes' Skill is one to imitate an opponent. And that imitation is followed by sealing, leading to plunder. The reason you were allowed to live was surely because she wanted to take your matured and polished Mana. But naturally as it may sound, she has her limits as well.』

Milleia-san stood, and put her hands on my shoulders. Without me realizing it, my breath had become rugged, and my sweat wouldn't stop coming out.

Milleia-san spoke to me kindly.

『Lyle, you've been taken and taken and taken from. But… originally, the one to become a monster would have been you.』

When I tried to turn to her, she hugged me from behind. I didn't get what she was trying to say.

At the same time, just a little… I had some intuition.

"I'm… the same as Celes, you say?"

Septem-san nodded. But she said this as well.

『The ones to become the next generation Septem were you and

Celes. But she was the one who couldn't permit it. So she took everything she could. As you are now, you are an existence with neither the memories nor powers of Septem. From my point of view, it's something to be jealous of, but the current you is nothing but an ordinary human. Perhaps that's precisely why Novem became your ally.』

I had no idea what to say. Learning I was the same monster as her, and hearing of how I'd been taken from all this time…

"H-huh? But the last time we met, I didn't feel anything was taken from me? Does that mean her Skill no longer has an effect on me?"

… When I said that, Milleia-san separated herself a bit, and burst into laughter.

『She said it, right? Celes has her own limits. And even if she takes more, she has not the leisure to maintain it at this point. Celes is already complete. Even so, Lyle, you've been corrupted by your ancestors in a good sense.』

When I tilted my head, Septem-san smiled. It seems she thought I was going to despair here, and had made a delightful miscalculation.

Septem-san spoke.

『Lyle, learn yourself. If you do, you're sure to go much higher than you have.』

I nodded, and confirmed it with Septem-san.

"Um, on another note… I've understood Celes' Skill. But in that case, just what sort of Skills could be in the Jewel she has…"

Septem-san looked at me, and spoke with a serious expression.

『Only one Skill was invoked. But Septem was the goddess that made Skills, you know? She could prepare any Skill she wanted. And it's not like you couldn't call that a Skill in itself.』

I thought.

(Well that's surprisingly shoddy. Since she was a goddess, I thought

she would be more fiendish.)

But even knowing it was shoddy didn't change the fact my opponent was formidable. And in truth, I couldn't even raise a hand against Celes.

"Then is the current Skill she's using from it one to charm her surroundings?"

Both Septem-san and Milleia-san shook their heads.

Milleia-san spoke.

『Listen closely, Lyle. Septem-sama… the goddess Septem, I mean, is the most revered entity to humanity. Do you remember anything from looking at Novem?』

Having Novem brought up so suddenly, I shook my head. Septem-san just said, 'When the time comes to speak, get the finer details from Novem'.

And she went on.

『It's because the one who created humans long ago was the goddess Septem.』

A question rose in my head at that point. It's true I was raised, hearing that the goddesses created humanity. But the goddess pertaining to that should be【Sex】.

The Sixth goddess.

"Um, the one who made us was Sex… the Sixth goddess, wasn't it?"

Milleia-san let out a sigh before speaking.

『That one's mistaken. But it's a mistake that can't be helped. In all actuality, Septem-sama is being treated as a goddess of wisdom these days. By the way, the wisdom part of it was just a freebee. Originally, Sex-sama carried the role of awakening humans.』

I wondered if they made it all so different. But I guess awakening and creating did surely differ.

And this talk was a bit too out there. Really, what do you expect me to do about it?

(Even if you talk about the distant past… um, it's just troubling.)

Milleia-san continued.

『It's the same as how Novem is liked by demi humans. Because long ago, the one who brought forth demi humans and divine beasts and monsters was Novem. Deeply inheriting those memories, she just has that sort of effect to her.』

Septem-san looked out the window, and murmured.

『The one to make humans was Septem. And the one who was supposed to awaken them, Sex… was killed by Novem. That child… Novem destroyed all the plans.』

Oh my.

(W-well damn. What should I do about that one…)

I couldn't follow the conversation.

For now, I can see that Novem betrayed Septem-san and the rest of them.

(Ah, come to think of it… Octō-san was supposed to be a traitor too, was she? If I just asked Septem-san here, then I really won't have to go out and find Octo-san.)

I felt a little sorry for her, but I decided I really wasn't going to have any relation to Octō-san.

9 - A Labyrinth Out of Control

Having returned to Beim, I took the paperwork, and headed for the Guild.

Timewise, it was some passed three.

There weren't too many adventurers, but it felt even tenser than usual. At the receptionist counter, despite the sparsity of adventurers, the staff personnel were moving around quite hastily.

And while watching over them, I checked the bulletin to see if a Labyrinth had been found, but there was no such notice.

The other adventurers also talked amongst themselves over the panicked state of the Guild.

"What's this? Some war break out somewhere?"
"If it's Galleria and Rusworth, then that's the same as always, right? Did they pick a fight with Zayin and Lorphys? No, was one picked with them…"
"Isn't this a bit too busy for something like that."

If a war started, I knew the Guild that organized the adventurers would get busy. But I felt something different from that here.

I took my papers up to the third floor, and found it was the same as usual. I mean, it was an area of private rooms, and I couldn't find other adventurers or receptionists there. I couldn't hear their conversations, so there's no way I could tell a change.

But something did feel off there.

(Is it my imagination?)

As I thought that, I entered a vacant room, and the receptionist stationed there looked at me a little tense.

Feeling the mood, the Fifth from the Jewel.

『Is it going to get troublesome again? Even for that, the previous

war didn’t have this sort of air.』

The Seventh hated adventurers, so he laughed.

『Isn’t it that some other country is invading them now? Beim needs to be beaten down once and put in its place.』

Milleia-san sighed.

『Good grief… really? Even when we have to let Beim survive for Lyle’s sake.』

I was convinced she was also a person of the Walt House. I sat in a chair, and handed over the completed request documents to the receptionist.

The other party politely accepted them, and after taking a fleeting glance at me…

“Good work. Did you notice anything strange?”

“Something strange?”

I had to venture out quite far to complete this request. I also had the members staying behind take care of odd job requests, but there wasn’t anything particularly strange.

I wondered if our party had done something, but there were too many things coming to mind, I really didn’t know. And as I pondered it, the receptionist hurriedly spoke.

“No, if nothing, then that’s fine. And could you come to renew your party members’ Guild Cards sometime in the near future?”

I recalled I didn’t renew them before setting off for the request, and it had been quite a while since we all went in to renew them together.

“Then when we come in for the next request. But I think we’ll be resting for a while, so the occasion may not come up soon.”

We had fulfilled numerous requests. Time-wise, we had a few weeks of leisure.

(And I wanted to try challenging Beim's Labyrinth too.)

Our income was getting better than before, but as expected, it wasn't what you could get from a Labyrinth. While I thought he would dislike the response, the receptionist's expression looked a little relieved.

And the Third didn't let that fact slip by.

『… Something's up. Investigate it at once. And Lyle…』

I tried asking.

"The Guild was quite tense, wasn't it? Did something happen?"

The receptionist's hand movements hesitated for a moment, but he soon gave a bitter smile.

"No, I'm sorry if it troubled you, but there hasn't been anything in particular… I did feel the air was strange as well, so I was thinking to ask the adventurers."

The receptionist made an appeal that he didn't know anything either, and I felt asking any more from him was futile, so I gave up. I could surely get it out of him if I used a Skill, but I didn't need to go that far for basic information.

(I'll have to go to Rauno-san's place later.)

The paperwork finished, I accepted the reward, and left the Guild.

❼

… The adventurers' Guild East Branch.

In the receptionists' rest room, the general workers manning the desks in nervousness and panic were flustered.

Marianne sat in a break room chair, resting the tea-filled cup she gripped in both hands on top of her lap.

If today were a normal day, she'd use this time to motivate herself.

She'd return to the receptions desk letting out a fluffy air, and deal with the newbie adventurers.

Her shift was from dawn until dusk. There were plenty of new recruits, and in order to get them to take care of miscellaneous requests, her time was fixed.

There, a new receptionist entered the room with some candy in hand, and opened her mouth.

"Listen to this. They gave me candy again!

The receptionist with her shoulder-length hair tied up on both sides was, while still young, a girl in use by the Guild.

Her tone was light, but she was capable. And her features were favorable, so she was well taken to by the adventurers. Because of that, she often received snacks and candies from then.

One of the personnel looked at that, and gave a wry smile.

"It's not good to accept too much. They're not soliciting anything from you, are they? It'll become trouble down the line, so put a stop to it."

There,【Rühe】said that wasn't the case, and went on.

"He said he wanted me to accept it. It's a really skilled adventurer party, and he's the leader of it. His income is high and stable, and he himself is young and talented. He often makes use of my counter."

Meaning he thinks I'm cute. Marianne looked at Rühe, and didn't quite know what to say.

It's often the case that adventurers that frequent a counter come to trust its receptionist. Or they just choose to compromise. Rather than going to a different receptionist each time, it would be easier to choose one that understood one's circumstances to an extent.

It's not like all adventurers were without ulterior motives, but as long as you kept servicing clients at the receptions desk, it was only natural to get a few parties.

Marianne's circumstances were different, and she didn't have any regulars. For better or worse, she was only there to supervise new adventurers. Once they grew, she was taken off their duty, and was to change her treatment of them.

So in the truest sense, she couldn't have regulars.

A female receptionist in her mid-twenties gave Rühe a warning.

"There are times you have to hand out bad jobs, so make sure you don't get your feelings too deep into it. Otherwise…"

But the individual herself stopped the important warning part-way through.

"I know. But there are quite a few adventurers who'll listen if it's my request. They'll do troublesome stuff if it's me asking them, they say."

Thinking she had gong into bragging, the female receptionist gave a, 'well good for you,' and held back her advice.

Watching a male receptionist hesitate over whether he should take over, Marianne let out a sigh.

It's not like Rühe was irritating her or anything. Of all else, Marianne herself was once a Rühe-esque existence.

(Perhaps this is how they were seeing me.)

Thinking that, she drank down her tea, and left her cup on the table.

"Ah, come to think of it… senpai, you're still on newbie rearing, right? With newbie adventurers, they're nothing but dreamers loaded with ulterior motives, so you must have it hard. In the past, one of the adventurers you were in charge of came over to my desk. And it was quite troublesome when they called me cute."

As Rühe tried to pick a fight with Marianne, the surrounding receptionists made dubious expressions. But Marianne laughed.

"I see. Sorry for that."

Perhaps losing interest, Rühe sat, held out her candy, and began

offering it to the other Guild personnel.

Marianne stood, and left the break room…

❼

When I returned to the mansion, I searched out Miranda.

I was going to head to Rauno-san's place, but whenever I went, it was customary to invite Miranda along.

The girl herself seemed satisfied with that, and on the way there and back, killing time with tea and shopping was the usual pattern.

I probed through the presences moving within the mansion, and headed for the place Miranda was.

"At this hour… ah, she's just come out of the bath, and is lounging around, I guess?"

When returning to Beim, the female members would generally, return to the mansion, and head for the bath. Unlike the bathhouse attached to the Guild, the fact this one could be used without the fear of bothering others was quite appealing, it seems.

It was needlessly vast, so maintaining it was a pain, but that part was managed by automatons with rough breath. For some reason, that space made them exceptionally excited.

(… The ancients that made Monica and co. were really perverts, weren't they.)

Now that they weren't around anymore, I didn't want to badmouth the deceased, but I couldn't really help it.

And as I was walking down the hallway, a voice called over.

It was Maksim-san. He walked towards me from the front with an expression that said he had been looking for me.

"Lyle-dono, so this is where you were. A guest was asking for you."

“For me? No, it’s not something rare. Who was it?”

I stopped going in Miranda’s direction, and turned towards the guest. And checking the surrounding Map Skill, I saw there definitely was one dropping by the manor.

Miranda had taken up my attention, so I hadn’t been focused on too wide a scope of the map up to now. I hadn’t notices.

As I walked next to the tall, muscular, armored Maksim, I felt I was quite scrawny.

“Who knows? But they seemed relatively busy. They are no acquaintance of mine, but Novem-dono was the one who let them in.”

I thought it would be pertaining to Zayin or Lotphys, but in that case, Maksim-san should’ve been able to identify them as well.

And if Novem let them in, there shouldn’t be a problem…

Right, there shouldn’t be a problem.

“Novem, huh.”

She brought a lot to mind. But the ancestors’ reactions were the greatest one. Remembering them still hurt my head.

Third and up.

『Isn’t it that? If it has something to do with demi humans, just leave it to Novem, and there won’t be a problem? Isn’t that an immense bonus?』

『The elves scattered across the continent, the dwarves and their numerous craftsmen. And the dexterous gnomes… add divine beasts onto that… this is it. With this, the probability of Lyle beating Celes has shot up.』

『But is that something you can place you expectations on? Personally, the talks of how Novem turned coat is bothering me… but no matter how you look at it, it’s a story of centuries passed.』

『It’s irrelevant. You must make use of everything you can. Because

the overwhelming gap in war potential has barely been filled in at all.』

Milleia-san, in regards to the reactions of those ancestors.

『All of you really do have a screw or two missing I see. Your reactions are truly wonderful, thinks I.』

Hearing that, the Third laughed.

『Even if you tell stories of the age of goddesses, that has absolutely no relation to us. Besides, when the story gets too large-scale for you to understand, why not just think, if they're an ally, then who cares! If they're going to become an enemy eventually, then deal with it when it happens. Or have Lyle make them weak at the knees.』

I don't have a problem with working hard for Novem, but seriously, just what do these people think I'm supposed to be?

I shook my head, and saw Maksim-san was looking at me in worry.

"What is the matter, Lyle-dono?"

"Ah, no… it's nothing."

That's right. What the ancients and the goddesses did who knows how long ago isn't my problem. The problem is that I have a goddess' leftovers, and that their descendants are still around.

(… A goddess' leftovers, huh. Who was the one that said it?)

Celes' leftovers, a goddess' leftovers… when the ancestors said that, I couldn't say anything in return. Because in all truth, I had this and that stolen by her, and sealed.

(Even when there's a mountain of problems I need to resolve… I really hope this one doesn't turn into trouble.)

And that pure and honest sentiment was trampled into the dirt all too easily.

The one who had come to the parlor was Tanya-san.

She wasn't wearing the staff uniform I saw her in at the Guild, nor was she wearing casual attire.

In a full suit, she looked somewhat nervous.

(Ah, I guess Maksim-san wouldn't know Tanya-san. Even if he's registered as an adventurer, we're the ones generally taking care of requests.)

As Tanya-san sat on the sofa, I gave my greetings, and sat down as well. At the side, Monica prepared tea, and Novem, who'd been talking with her before I came in was making a bit of a grim expression.

"Did something happen."

From Novem's expression, I could anticipate it was something that would be quite disadvantageous to our side. The Seventh opened his mouth.

『Oh? Did they come to pick a fight? Saves us the trouble. We graciously accept your petty squabble, adventurers' Guild!』

Why does he detest them so…

When I ignored him and looked at Tanya-san's face, she encouraged me to look at the envelope left on the table.

"This is information only known to a small fraction of the Guild."

Hearing that, I looked through the papers. It was what I had seen at Rauno-san's place before, the information on that village.

But the Guild's report said it was in quite a dangerous state.

Tanya-san continued on.

"The Labyrinth is going out of control. It's an event that hasn't happened around Beim for the past twenty years. It seems a retired adventurer who returned to his homeland is involved."

According to the documents, in the few weeks I'd been away from

Beim, it had taken a considerable bad turn.

It was written that clearing the Labyrinth was impossible, and that Beim had already determined it would move on the defense.

Novem opened her mouth.

"… And that is quite an unfortunate result. But for what reason have you brought this talk to Lyle-sama?"

Novem glared warily at Tanya-san.

Tanya-san put Monica's tea to her mouth.

"Beim's adventurers' Guild… the Guild headquarters holds quite a high evaluation of Lyle-kun. They want him to participate in this defensive war by all means."

With not the East Branch, but the Guild Headquarter's name coming out, I thought.

(The fact that it's a mandate of the headquarters means it'll become quite a pain later if I go against it. But what's the meaning behind putting this much pressure on a single small party?)

There I heard the Fourth's voice from the Jewel.

『I see. They want to get Lyle, who had such an influence in Zayin and Lorphys, under their fingers. At the very least, will those two countries abandon their savior? You think Beim's trying to put down that pressure?』

There, the Fifth in a low voice.

『We're being underestimated. Even if they didn't stoop that low, we'd participate, naturally. Even if we didn't, I'm sure Beim would be able to pull through, but this is a chance.』

The fact these ancestors considered a rampaging Labyrinth a chance was surely because of the screws blown out of their heads.

The Seventh as well.

『A defensive battle, is it? We'll have to raise Lyle's name even

higher. While we're at it, we can get Beim itself in our debt. But it will be troublesome if they use Lyle as a reason to drag Zayin and Lorphys in. There's no profit in it for those two.』

The Third spoke delightedly.

『Come to think of it, they both have a debt to Beim. Doesn't that sound interesting? How about we take the initiative to drag them in, and lower their dues. Yay! It's starting to get fun! The enemy will be an army of tens to hundreds of thousands of monsters! We'll need to prepare!』

I got the urge to hold me head, and looked down. It seems Tanya took that motion as my considering of a refusal.

I mean, if a Labyrinth went out of control, the Labyrinth would wither, but even so, it would spit out several tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of monsters before it did.

There have been many countries that have fallen from Labyrinths, and that was the cause of the difficulty in Labyrinth management.

Tanya-san spoke.

"It's certain that this time's request is a difficult one. But this time, there is a very important–"

"The one to decide will be Lyle-sama. Or did you think you could force us into it?"

As Novem held up her hand as if to intimidate Tanya-san, I raised my face.

(… I can't go about not joining in here, and if I can sell a favor, it's best I sell it. And Zayin and Lorphys need to pay back what they owe.)

I turned a smile to Tanya-san.

"Of course I'll participate. I, Lyle Walt, shall take a stand as Beim faces its time of crisis. For that sake, I'll first need to arrange for Zayin and Lorphys' cooperation! Leave it to me, I'll get their agreement at once. While I'm at it, I can be assured that Beim will

pay a financial reward to those two countries, can't I?"

I checked beforehand, and Tanya-san's face stiffened.

"U-unless I consult with my superiors, I can't really say anything."

"Then you'd best get moving! Novem, prepare for war!"

"Yes, Lyle-sama."

Watching Novem stand with a smile and leave the room, I thought.

(… What exactly did she go off to do when I said to prepare for war, I wonder?)

We had experience in fighting on a small scale, but when it grew this large, I had no experience. Unlike my time with Zayin and Lorphys, we would likely be clashing upfront with monsters.

I looked at Monica nearby, who watched me in anticipation to see if I would issue an order to her as well, as I inclined my ear to the voices in the Jewel.

And in lament, Milleia-san looked over the fired up ancestors, and offered her take.

『They're really having fun in here. Are you having fun too, Lyle?』

(I'm not!)

10 - I Want to Stand Out!

The parlor of the mansion. I had called Zayin's High Priest Gastone-san.

And Lorphys' Prime Minister Lonbolt-san.

Knight of Lorphys, Alette-san along as an escort, I carried out negotiations alongside Adele-san.

Diagonally behind me was Monica.

Maksim-san occupied that position behind Adele-san. And Alette-san stood similarly behind Lonbolt-san. When she heard my proposal, her expression crumbled.

Seeing that, I was sure the Third was grinning as he spoke.

『Just because you're friends, you can't go off showing your expression like that little Alette-chan. We're making a proposal that benefits all parties, aren't we?』

And I'm sure the Fourth was making a serious expression. Irritated at that.

『What's she so worried about here!? It'll cut down whatever you lot borrowed from Beim! Don't think we're not aware of your financial situation!』

The Fifth, fed up as he was.

『By the way, we also know full well how many troops you can mobilize.』

Gastone-san looked even more worn out than before. And he confirmed over my proposal.

"F-from both countries… five thousand troops from Zayin and Lorphys? No matter how you look at it, that is…"

I made a serious expression.

“That’s wrong. It’s five thousand troops each. You’ll be putting out ten thousand total. By the way, this is speaking in terms of pure fighting power. It doesn’t include a count for support roles.”

The reason I demanded troops from both countries was simple. If I didn’t, we wouldn’t win. No, perhaps I should say we wouldn’t fulfill the conditions for victory I was aiming for.

Beim was a land where adventurers gathered.

If you wanted to look at its able fighting force, it could instantly scrape up a hundred thousand. But that would be a volunteer army of adventurers and residents.

An inconsistent hundred thousand. There were mercenary brigades as well, and there were well-drilled groups around for what they were worth, but getting them together would be difficult.

Lonbolt-san’s calm expression had crumbled.

“That is impossible in our present state. We’re having enough trouble as it is getting the land we’ve only just gotten our hands of under control.”

And that I knew. As I wasn’t opening my mouth, Adele-san spoke up.

“But in the off chance Beim fails in defense, even if they don’t face defeat, a large mass of monsters will flow across the lands. At that time, can you say for sure none of them will flow into Zayin or Lorphys? To add to that, Lyle-san’s participation in this defense has already been set in stone. It’s only a matter of time before Beim begins to pressure you as well.”

Gastone-san groaned. Both countries were quite close to Beim. So up to this point, they had racked up quite a debt with the city.

Even in that last war, they had a loan from Beim. So we planned to make that loan into a favor, and exploit it.

With something like this happening, it’s only natural they seek assistance.

“How does two thousand troops sound? That much should be

enough to carry a large part of the defense.”

On Lonbolt-san’s proposal, the Seventh scoffed.

『Well that’s not enough. In that case, we won’t stand out in the slightest!』

I crossed my legs, and crossed my arms over them.

“You think that is enough to gain Beim’s gratitude? Massive debt… if we cannot reduce it here, change shall not come to both of your countries’ harsh financial affairs. And what I’ll be defending is the front most lines.”

Alette-san spoke.

“The front most… line. You’re not sane. And why must we do it?”

Isn’t that obvious? Why should Zayin and Lorphys undertake the life and death battle of the front most lines? Is there really a need to go that far for Beim?

I spoke quite plainly.

“I won’t say the current the current delegate is a failure, but up to this point, both countries have borrowed, and borrowed more. That bloated debt is a considerable sum, isn’t it? At this rate, it really is just going to keep growing.”

The repayment couldn’t keep up. And perhaps in an attempt to repay it, a war and even more debt…

The thing called money really was a monster.

Beim had an influential voice in its surrounding countries, and that was a reason it was independent.

Gastone-san turned to me, and spoke. It felt like he’d given up a bit.

“What are our chances? And what sort of terms do you plan to pull out of Beim? The adventurers’ Guild and merchants aren’t easy.”

It does seem Gastone-san was going to assist me. Having lost an ally, Lonbolt-san was making a reproachful expression.

The Third laughed.

『That's right! When your country's savior is asking, it's downright embarrassing to send out less troops than the smaller Zayin! Even when we nearly doubled your landmass for you!』

I made a smile.

Chances? That's uncertain as long as we don't know the scale of our enemy monsters. But if I told them there were some uncertain factors, and that it was dangerous, I couldn't think they would send out troops.

"We will win. Through victory, we shall show the world. The power of the reborn Zayin and Lorphys."

I was sweating quite heavily inside. I may be sending masses of soldiers to their deaths. It was on a different level from when I was only a supporting role to Lorphys.

The scale had grown to the tens of thousands range.

Lonbolt-san lowered his shoulders.

"… Please know we won't be satisfied with a mere ten percent cut in debt."

"Of course. Let's wring them out for all they've got. And… Don't you think Beim holds a little too much power?"

I turned a grin to the two of them, and began speaking of my plans from here on.

Alette-san quietly mumbled.

"Lyle-san, you're even worse than I thought you were."

❼

… In Beim's Guild Headquarters, the urgently-gathered management were conducting negotiations with their guests.

Those guests were Zayin's High Priest, and Lorphys' Prime Minister.

As the guard and support of her superior of the East Branch, who'd been called in, Tanya was participating in the meeting.

(For him to move that fast. What's more, these two…)

The two leaders with light reflecting off their smooth heads had come forth to offer assistance in Beim's time of crisis.

That part was all and good. The Guild and Beim's merchants had partly been lending out money for a time like this.

But the extent of their assistance had exceeded Beim's estimates.

Lonbolt stood from his chair, and slammed a fist on the table.

"How can this be!? When we're preparing five thousand in pure fighting forces, you'll drive us to the sidelines in this defense!? What codswallop is this!?"

Tanya watched over the meeting trying to keep up a poker face. Her superior was making a troubled expression, and as expected, he was a little panicked.

"No, while we appreciate the sentiment, if you call that the pure fighting force… how much would your full forces number?"

Lonbolt stuck out his chest.

"They're sure to surpass eight thousand. My elite men of Lorphys will surely protect your city of Beim!"

(That's almost all their troops. Even if you do that, it's just troubling for us. Send two or three thousand, and that's enough to…)

Originally, they wanted to have both countries dispatch five thousand total. And stationing them in places facing difficulty in defense, Beim wanted to concentrate its own forces.

The Prime Minister Gastone agreed with Lonbolt.

"Zayin holds the same sentiment. What's more, our hero of salvation, Lyle-dono is participating in this war, wishing for the foremost lines of

war. The Holy Knights are already prepared. We'll surely be able to move nine thousand when the time comes."

That side had also prepared the maximum number of troops it could move.

The adventurers' Guild, and the merchant representatives laughed.

"Well thanks for that."
"No, you're both so reliable."
"But having you go that far is…"

Don't do anything unnecessary, was likely what the executives participating in the meeting were thinking. Over all else, they were going so far to have the front lines left to them.

Beim anticipated that the foremost line would be breached.

And if in that time, a large number of casualties were to surface, they would have to provide reimbursement in kind. Beim would. And if they said something like, 'you went and helped us on your own, so we won't offer a reward,' it would create a problem of trust down the line.

Gastone let out a low voice.

"If Beim falls, we will not get out of this safely. So in this battle, Zayin shall be using all its forces. But if we were to make such an announcement within the country, complaints are sure to surface."

There, one of the executives bit on.

"I'm sure. So why not dispatch half that number, and let Beim handle the–"

Lonbolt took over Gastone's explanation, and cut off the executive's remark.

"However! Having taken the front lines of our own accord, we'll ask no reward for failure. Yes, then how does that sound? Embarrassing as it may be, my country has a debt with Beim. If it is written off, there will be no problems between us."

Hearing those words, a number of executives confirmed their suspicions, and narrowed their eyes. Tanya's superior nearby also spoke quietly to himself.

"Well, of course it comes to that. But money-wise…"

One of the executives spoke.

"You speak of sums too great… we appreciate the assistance of both your countries, but your debt is no small one, is it not? A sum that large is… understood. How does twenty percent sound?"

From the start, they were willing to decrease it by thirty. They had calculated that given the time, it would return to its original value, and that reduction was only planned to reduce dissatisfactions.

It was that sort of bait, but…

Gastone opened his eyes wide.

"By the goddess! Our assistance only holds that much value to you!? Alas, it does seem you understand just how much both Zayin and Lorphys are putting into this single battle. Very well then. I'll add on another two thousand… oh, in that case, I am lacking in supplies."

Lonbolt nodded.

"Gastone-dono, the supplies will be prepared by Beim. You need not worry. Yet, for them to value us at twenty percent… understood. Then we will be fine if you leave but ten percent of the debt still standing."

After that, the two of them refused to be swayed, and in the end, thinking them worthy of the foremost line destined to collapse, the Beim side promised a seventy percent cancellation of debt.

In exchange, they couldn't provide any compensation for those killed in action.

The two leaders spoke with smiles.

"Very well, I must return at once, and return to Aura-sama."

"There are some preparations to be made in Lorphys, so I must take

my leave.”

After the two of them had left, a few of the executives…

“Even if they get some tens of thousands of deaths, as long as the debt goes down, they’ve no complaints? Quite a greedy priest and minister we have here.”

“Rites for the deceased, and treatment for the injured. They’re going to come crying to Beim in the end. There’s no problem.”

And the meeting changed gears to the defense of Beim.

Tanya tried thinking over who was moving the two countries from the shadows…

(Could it really be Lyle-kun?)

❼

“Could you prepare a few Valkyrie units before the army of monsters starts making its move? I’d like you to put them together as fast as possible.”

Having dropped by the mansion’s warehouse, I looked over the golem Damien and old Letarta had put together, and tried asking.

The human skeleton portion had been completed, and some mechanical parts had been installed on top.

The torso portion, and the limbs were being produced separately, and at this point, it didn’t look anything like the form of a woman. A liquid-filled conical tank had been prepared, and if I only watched it, it truly looked as if dubious experiments were being carried out here.

Damien took off his gloves.

“Well that’s quite sudden. This stuff took up quite some money, but if we simplified, and got them together… it’ll take even more money, but maybe five units?”

Old Letarta rested his tool against his shoulder.

“If you want ones of the same construction as this girl here, then three. But what’s this all of a sudden?”

Holed up in the mansion’s warehouse, gleefully putting golems together, the two of them didn’t seem to have an understanding of the situation around Beim.

So I explained it. Damien didn’t sound all too interested regardless.

“Sounds just about right for a combat test. But in that case, the enemy’s an army of monsters… it’s best we prepare three of these ones.”

Old Letarta also nodded.

“Yes, that definitely sounds best.”

If both of them were saying that.

“Then please put together three. I want to get them on the front lines as soon as possible. No, the transport will also be necessary, so I’ll need to take a few round trips between Beim and the fort.”

Hearing that, Damien turned, and looked at the large Porter.

“Want to use that? Just take us in the last load. Its controls are the same.”

Looking at the modified Porter model that looked like it could carry massive amounts of cargo, I nodded at once.

“I’ll use it with pleasure.”

Damien looked at me, touching his hand to his chin.

“You look busy. Where are you going next?”

I recited my next destination with a smile.

“Vera’s place.”

Old Letarta, upon hearing that.

“The young lady’s place? That sounds about right.”

… He nodded.

(Right. Let’s fan the flames a bit, and ask for aid. And wait, is there really a need to fan them?)

With the ancestors’ advice as a base, I turned to my next actions.

❼

“THAT DAMN GIGOLOOOOO!!”

In his own room, Fidel Trēs lowered both his fists on his desk.

“I will be heading for the front lines to protect Beim. So I came to ask for some financial aid… father-in-law.”

Recalling Lyle’s grinning face, Fidel lowered his fists a number of times, getting his well-ordered hair in a mess.

“It’s not like the front lines are going to hold, so when I said I’d back him… goddammiiiit!!”

Fidel was a merchant. He couldn’t say he wouldn’t support Lyle, who had resolved himself for Beim’s foremost battlements.

If he was going to disappear here, it was a cheap buy. So he promised his aid. There, Vera…

“I-I don’t have any more money, but take the cannons and guns from my ship. You can break them if you want, but make sure you come back, okay?”

She said, with her head hung in worry.

Irked as he was, he managed to endure that one. But as if to rile him up, Lyle embraced Vera before Fidel’s eyes.

“D-don’t worry. I’ll definitely come back to your side.”

He said, as he clung to the man’s precious daughter. If his subordinates weren’t there, he’d have loaded the boy with balls of lead, or so burned the hatred in his chest.

“And he kept taking glances my way to agitate me, that greenhorn!!”

With Lyle purposely stirring him up with each and every action, Fidel couldn’t take it anymore.

“When the Guild told him to join in, forget hesitation, he gleefully jumped to the fray… not a hint of lovableness in that child. But this is the end. Even he can’t block several tens of thousands of monster.”

Beim had prepared a fort.

They had a fort near the border for times like these, but a Labyrinth out of control could spew out countless foes. There’s no way it could be blocked.

It couldn’t be helped the front line be breached, and the second, and third defensive lines were there to whittle away at the numbers as well. As long as the city of Beim was untouched, they could regain their footing no matter what happened. That was the verdict of Fidel and the merchants.

“The Guild is feckless. Just because two countries felt cooperative, they wrote off a majority of their debt. Well, if they get crushed here, they’re going to be dependent on Beim again within the next ten years.”

He had regained his composure, but even now, he felt his innards boiling as he thought over the amount to send to Lyle.

Just because he was likely to die here, that doesn’t mean he could give a small sum.

Unlike the other defensive points, the front most line had death as almost a definite.

“Hmph, fanning me up so persistently… I’ll at least give you a good dream at the end.”

Thinking three hundred to five hundred thousand would maintain his honor, Fidel decided to take such actions.

“Well, if you think of it as getting rid of a pesky bug, then it’s cheap as can be. Just one left!”

And not as a merchant, his fatherly feelings had started to come out again…

11 - Look Ahead

Inside the Jewel.

I sat around the round table with my ancestors, but their unusual attitude caused me to stare in mute amazement.

“Eh? So you don’t have any plans like you usually do?”

On my words, the Fifth looked fed-up. And he pressed his left hand to his forehead.

『Are you an idiot? I’ve said it before, have I not? War is about numbers. It’s a defensive war, so you’ll have the advantage, to an extent, but a few tens of thousands is going to take on a great army of hundreds of thousands? Like hell you can win that easily.』

Perhaps the Third shared his sentiment, as he laughed like he usually did.

『You can’t overturn this sort of simple numerical difference. You’ve got just a bit of time to go, so just do whatever you can.』

The Fourth took off his glasses.

『You think a plan we can come up with was never before thought up by our predecessors? At the very point a Labyrinth went out of control, it was already a failure. At times like these, looking at reality is number one.』

Then why did you recommend I go to the front lines?

“But does that mean we cannot win? Why did you decide I should take over the front lines then!?”

There, the Seventh gave a grin.

『Because the victory Beim seeks, and the victory you seek are different things. It’s true that from Beim’s point of view, they can’t really call it a loss. But we will win.』

When I tilted my head, Milleia-san standing behind me breathed out a sigh.

『Lyle, take up a wider field of vision. A small country that let a Labyrinth run rampant. Beim would never go to its relief, right? Even if this rampage does end, would Beim ever assist in reconstructing that country? Would they ever move to get it under control?』

Beim didn't have too much territory.

They had a bit of a strange method of ruling, and even if their territory grew, they wouldn't be able to maintain it. No, even if they did, they believe it wouldn't be profitable enough to keep up.

When this Labyrinth went out of control, they did warn the surrounding countries. But by the time those countries moved, it would already be too late, and we were in a state where everyone was only waiting for it to burst.

The problem was the proximity of that Labyrinth to Beim, and the fact that monsters would flow into the city with absolute certainty.

The Guild estimated that a majority of the monsters would head for Beim, and in all actuality, monsters had a trend of heading towards cities with the highest populations.

As I couldn't understand what was going on, the Third explained.

『Now then, because of its policy, Beim doesn't care about ruling land. But it's not like all countries are like that, right? Now what's on the other side of our distressed neighbor, Lyle?』

"It's Bahnseim. Will they make a move?"

The Fourth let his glasses catch the light as he spoke.

『Yes, they'll make a move. More than that, they should be gathering an army on the border. It will be for defensive purposes, but once that's gone and done with, there's a possibility they will invade. They can prepare reasons like reconstruction and relief if they want, but the biggest problem is that, you know… you can't trust a country that let a Labyrinth run out of control.』

If it happened in a remote, uninhabited region, it would be understandable.

If a Labyrinth popped up somewhere no one ever ventured, it's natural that the countermeasures run late. But feudal lords exist so as not to let that happen.

The ancestors were looking… beyond the victory of this defensive war.

The Fifth spoke.

『Bahnseim will become our neighbor. Even if they don't move at once, Beim will have to deal with them… You think a measly fort on the border is enough to set their minds at ease? It's likely Beim wants to buy some time. They've gained full power over that fort, and I think they'll move quite a few hands.』

If you want to speak to the extremes, Beim was fine as long as the city was safe. Even if they lost surrounding towns and villages, even if their self-sufficiency in food fell by a wide margin, as long as the city district was safe, Beim would be able to get back on its feet.

The city of merchants and adventurers could use its over-superfluous assets to purchase masses of produce.

Because of that, the main forces of this war were hardened around the fortress city of Beim.

Evacuation was also promoted around, and quite a large number of people were gathering there from the surrounding regions.

The gathering men were likely planned to be used as make-shift soldiers.

The Fourth.

『So let's add on to the fort. It isn't just for this defensive. We'll be glaring at Behnseim from there in the future.』

"You're thinking that far into it? You really do like war."

There, the Third made a fed-up expression.

『Hah? I hate it. I'm sure I told you before.』

"Eh? But…"

The Seventh, as if to warn me.

『Listen here, Lyle. War is but a single means. It isn't something you do because you like it.』

"No, but you all look quite eager."

The Fifth spoke quite plainly.

『If you've decided you're going to do it, then you'd better be thorough about it. If possible, I wouldn't want to do something like war, and it's best it never happens. It wastes money, you lose the talents you've brought up, you lose supplies… it's the worst. Even so, if you're going to do it anyways, you just have to put the maximum amount of effort into it.』

Milleia-san didn't put in her mouth.

There, the Fourth looked at me.

『Lyle, feudal lord is a profession where war is just an extension of our usual duties. If you can avoid it, then avoid it, and hold a military so your enemies don't invade you however they want. You'd do best to remember this. Fighting monsters is the same. Never forget your goal in it. Fight because it is necessary. That's all there is to it.』

Seeing their four serious faces, I silently nodded.

There, the Third raised his hand.

『So is that talk over yet? Then let's move to the main topic… next, we should go to the Guild to tell them to send out some people of their own! Like hell they'd actually do it, though!』

To a delighted Third, Milleia-san opened her mouth.

『Oh my, then why call out to them?』

『Because I want the fact we asked for cooperation, and they refused! For the sake of the future, we should pile up these sorts of

‘truths’ while we can』

『So it’s to steal their authority in the future, I see. How wonderful!』

Watching those two laugh so happily, the Fourth complained to himself.

『I’d like to extort some more from that Fidel bastard. That guy’s definitely still got some financial leisure. It’s painful that this much isn’t enough to shake Beim at all.』

The Fifth looked at the three dimensional map of the fort and its surroundings projected on top of the table.

『We have the time, and we have the people. If we have the funds, then we can do some large-scale construction here. If we’re to prepare traps, then what types should we choose… I wonder.』

He was smirking as he thought over where to lay the traps.

The Seventh spoke with a smile.

『And there’s ample forces behind our line as well. There’s no harm in letting some monsters through. And we’re taking home the magic stones and materials we recover. It seems Beim intends to buy them off, but no one said we have to sell.』

The Third laughed.

『The advance force has already reached the fort, and the preparations are moving forward. Because Beim said that point wasn’t going to hold anyways, and that we could do whatever we wanted! So let’s make it flashy!』

I looked at the five, and thought.

(That was a lie. These people are definitely having fun!)

❼

… In【Fort Redant】, a fort on Beim’s border, the soldiers were undergoing a change in leadership.

There was usually a small number of men maintaining the fort, and a few mercenary brigades were hired for defensive purposes. The border was not a tense one, and all the fort really stood for was eliminating the surrounding monsters to guarantee safety in the area.

The country it bordered had a debt to Beim, and it couldn't carelessly invade. The fort was only stationed for appearance's sake.

And in order to escape from that decoration of a fort, the leader of the soldiers was handing authority to the new one in charge.

That new one's name was【Noy Verdell】.

Captain of Zayin's Holy Knight Brigade, and one who had led over nine thousand men to the fort.

"U-um…"

"Something more you wish to say?"

When Noy said that, the head soldier looked towards the new legion coming down the main road.

Judging by the flag, it was Lorphys' knight brigade, with their soldiers following behind. Their numbers were equal to Zayin's.

"No, I heard you were to defend this point, but are you serious? This is, well… more a decoration than anything else."

When he and his soldiers were going to evacuate, hearing of how people of foreign lands were coming around for defense, the head soldier couldn't help but think it foolish.

But in all truth, some tens of thousands were gathering around the small fort. Is it really alright that we run away? Thought the soldier.

"Those are my orders. Oh, we'll try our best not to let them get passed. But it really is small. I've passed through here before, but what shall I do… I've been ordered to wait for Lyle-dono's instruction…"

Noy was originally an adventurer of Beim. A former noble of knight

lineage. Once that lineage collapsed, he had flowed all the way to Beim.

But Lyle had handed him the knight captain position, and he was now a knight of Zayin.

As the head soldier looked around in confusion, a large metal box was heading for the fort down a different road…

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… Not having a fort built over it for nothing, that location was quite suitable for defense.

It wasn't placed on flat ground, and while you couldn't call it a natural stronghold by any means, it was adequate enough for a fort.

Controlling Damien's Porter, Clara confirmed the information about the fort before addressing the automatons she'd borrowed from Damien, No. 2 and No. 3.

"Well then, shall we take in the finer details, and get them all together? I think Lyle-san will be coming, so by the time he does, we need to get as good a grasp of the terrain as we… are you listening to me?"

Automatons No. 2 and No. 3 were making expressions even more unmotivated than usual, as they dropped their shoulders on the spot.

"For me to be unable to work by my master's side."

"When that scrap metal Poyopoyo remained behind, why must I… she should just be scrapped."

It had been decided that Lyle would ride May to the fort later, and Clara couldn't see any motivation in the automatons she had borrowed.

"Um, if you don't do your work, I'm sure Professor Damien will be troubled when he comes…?"

She tried using Damien's name.

“Master doesn’t have any interest in the finer details.”

“Well, we’ll do what you ask. Whatever you ask. But there’s no helping if we can’t get motivated as we do it. I mean, we’re maids after all.”

Clara corrected her glasses’ positioning with a finger.

(That’s definitely irrelevant to being a maid.)

With that on her mind, she turned back to the fort.

“Largescale construction here… Lyle-san, what could you be thinking?”

Even if he hurried to make the fort larger, before a hundred thousand monsters, it would be rendered pointless. Unless they used some special construction, the monsters’ attacks would blow it all away.

Tools and the like were loaded onto Damien’s jumbo Porter, but even if the fort’s constructions made it in time, it would only be for show.

Clara instantly confirmed her surroundings, and planned her trip back to Beim. There, she would receive another load, and return her once more.

And as her guard, Aria had been selected.

She jumped down from the Porter, held up her spear, and let out a yawn.

“Hey, is it really alright that Adele and Maksim-san be the ones giving orders here?”

When Aria asked, Clara nodded.

“That’s Lyle-san’s orders after all. It seems Adele-san’s an expert on that sort of thing, and Maksim-san is her guard.”

Clara’s party had arrived at the fort beforehand.

And from Porter, Maksim stepped down with Adele on his back. She had gotten drunk on the way, and rendered useless.

Maksim called out to Adele in worry.

“Milady, are you alright?”

“S-sorry. I can’t go on…”

Aria, seeing Adele like that sounded quite worried for a different reason.

“Will we *really* be alright?”

After mulling over a bit, Clara just gave a quiet nod…

❼

When I went to the guild to ask for manpower, they offered a gentle refusal.

I asked them to spare some capable personnel, but as expected, they were concentrating their forces on the defense of the city, and they refused me.

Taking Novem and Miranda along, I left the Guild headquarters, and headed for Rauno-san’s office.

Miranda, perhaps unable to understand my actions.

“You stepped down quite easily. I thought you would negotiate some more, you know? On the contrary, you ended up surprising your negotiation partners.”

If I continued negotiation, perhaps they would have dispatched some personnel that wouldn’t hurt too much to lose.

But if that was the case, it would be more beneficial to our cause if they remained uncooperative from the start.

“There was a meaning to it. The fact they didn’t want to help us.”

It seems that was enough for Miranda to get my meaning. She narrowed her eyes.

“I’m not sure your intentions, but I get the feeling it’s too soon to

make an enemy of the Guild, you know?”

Novem didn’t say a thing towards my actions.

But…

“Lyle-sama, what shall we do with Eva-san? Even if you get the cooperation of the elves, numerically, you may get a few hundred at most.”

I had Eva call out to her brethren, and ask for their assistance. I really wanted Novem to do it, but she declined with a vague smile.

If I pleaded a bit more, perhaps I could get her to call out, but I put a stop to it on my own judgement.

“Even a few hundred can serve its purpose. They’re a former hunter race. Those living in the city may have thrown down their bows, but they have their song. Don’t you think manipulating information is important?”

Miranda shrugged.

“You’re already thinking of after your victory? You already have a lot of songs about you, don’t you?”

I still had to make connections while I could. And I needed even wider fame.

For that time, getting the elven singers on our side was a vital point.

Novem looked at me.

“Do as you like.”

But that’s all she said.

(Here, victory isn’t our end goal. Right. My goal is…)

They’re still thinking of it as fire on the opposite shore. And before the fear of the monsters before them, Beim wasn’t seeing the danger of Celes just beyond them…

I had to instill in them a sense of crisis.

And before that crisis came, I had to get a certain level of fame.

As I walked around with the two of them, I heard Milleia-san's voice. It seems she thought of something as she looked at Miranda.

『She's got talent. But as I thought, it's a bit lacking. Lyle, could you invite Miranda to the Jewel sometime soon? Ah, bring Shannon along, 'kay?』

I had a bit of a bad premonition about this.

12 - An Army of Monsters

When I headed for the mansion's storehouse to look over Damien's work, old Letarta's grandson came up to me.

He was carrying a wooden crate, and he had brought over a change of clothes for old Letarta, who had stayed night after night to work.

What old Letarta pulled out of the box was the weapon called a katana, apparently.

"So it's finally complete!"

Monica looked delighted, but the old man's grandson was making quite a tired expression.

"Ordering me to make a custom weapon I've never heard of in such a busy time… now listen here, you never told me how many steps it would take to make just a single one, did you? The hell's with polishing?"

The reason for his fatigue was likely because of the army of monsters about to manifest. The blacksmiths had their share of things to prepare.

Even so, with an order to forge a brand new weapon, the young dwarven man had done his best to complete it… alone.

Feeling quite apologetic, I looked in the box to find five swords of slightly different shape. Letarta was looking over one of them.

"Can I see?"

"I mind it not. It's your weapon. I'm sure it needs some adjustments, so use my grandson how you will."

The young dwarf dropped his shoulders.

"How do you expect me to adjust an unknown weapon…"

Old Letarta returned the blade to its scabbard. Reaching his hand

out to another one, he confirmed each katana one after the next.

“Quite considerate of you to use sabre handles for them, but… isn’t this a bit off?”

When he tilted his head, Monica alone was the only one who looked happy, as she turned just her head to look at us.

“That’s just how it is.”

“No, no matter how you look at it, this is…”

As old Letarta seemed confused, I took one in my hands, and drew it. It had a gentle curve, and there were pretty ripples along the edge.

Just looking at it made it feel I was getting sucked in, but it utilized an enclosed sabre hilt intended for one hand, and holding it alone made me feel its difficulty of use.

Cut, thrust, taking a stance, as a result of testing those actions, I… returned to the storehouse, and lowered a fist onto Monica’s head. Her golden twin tails swayed.

“It’s for a completely different use! Just what part of it is similar enough!? This is a completely different weapon! What’s more, it was definitely intended for two hands!”

Monica held her head with both hands.

“Don’t worry. It’s cool.”

I grabbed the twin tails, and pulled them in opposite directions.

“Wait! My precious twin tails will be plucked! My precious cuticles! Stop! But, if you want them that much, I can regrow them in an instant, so I wouldn’t mind giving them to you… not that I like you or anything.”

So is she mad, happy, or what?

I handed the ‘katana’ to the young dwarf.

“What should we do? Do you want me to shorten it a bit?”

“No, keep it as it is. Whichever the case, I have another request for you, so I’d like you to prioritize that.”

“… Eh? I never heard anything about that.”

The young dwarf looked at Letarta, as the old man finished looking over the final one of the blades.

“I’m busy, so you’re going to take the request. What, there are times where you can experience growth through work. I’m sure that son-in-law of mine is busy, so do your best.”

The youth dropped his shoulders once more.

On top of old Letarta’s work desk, there were a number of female arms, with the upper arms branching to mechanical contraptions. Some thigh-to-feet were hung on the storehouse’s wall.

They had feminine lines, and were earnestly being developed.

“Are things going favorably here?”

When I looked at the desk and confirmed it, old Letarta nodded.

“When that Damien boy finishes the main body, all we have to do is put them together. I finished the armor too, but I’m still pondering whether real bird wings, or mechanical wings would be best.”

I wanted to tell him not to fuss over something like that, but it looked like he was seriously thinking it over.

“As long as you can finish it in two weeks’ time, you can ponder all you want.”

There, old Letarta looked at me.

“Oh? The monsters are coming in two weeks? You sure you should be here then, bro?”

I scratched my head.

According to Rauno-san’s information, monsters were already streaming out of the Labyrinth. It had been unskillfully made deeper, so it couldn’t be helped that the estimations had the numbers

reached a few hundred thousand.

Some adventurers of Beim had gone for recon, and a majority of monsters showed signs of heading in Beim's direction over all else.

"I already have my transport in order. Work is going favorable on that side as well. In regards to manpower… not from Beim, I'm borrowing all the help from Zayin and Lorphys that I can get."

This time, Clara was making considerable contributions to transportation, and adding onto the fort.

She proposed the optimum stronghold from her knowledge. With that as the base, I prepared funds, and got together the necessary materials and tools.

After that, I could only leave it to the craftsmen.

At that moment, from an isolated part of the storehouse, Damien emerged wearing a lab coat. Automaton maid No. 1 was by his side, and for some reason, she looked quite giddy.

"Huh? You're back again?"

"I had some business here."

Damien removed his glasses, and wiped their lenses.

"Things are moving favorably here. I think we'll have to start them up at the fort, but we'll just barely make it, I guess?"

"They'll move properly, right?"

Automaton.

Unlike Monica's race, it was something much more primitive, or so Damien said. But you could also call them basic automatons specialized for battle.

Old Letarta spoke.

"They'll move for what it's worth, but the problem is we don't know what extent of abilities they can exhibit. A golem's strength all depends on the human controlling them. Even if you make ones that

move on their own, how are we supposed to know how high its performance will be?”

Damien put his glasses back on.

“We’ll make it, so fret not. I always wanted a performance test in real battle! So why did you return, this time?”

I let out a sigh.

“… To pick up the guns. I also need to get gunpowder and such at Vera’s place.”

Vera said she’s go to Fort Redant too, but as expected, that one was too much for Fidel-san to permit.

The valuable sailors couldn’t be lent out by the Trēs House either, so I’d have to teach up on guns over there.

I wanted to prepare as many bows and crossbows as possible, but Beim was also scraping those weapons up, so it was in a state where you couldn’t buy them, even if you had money.

“I heard you fired up that Fidel whelp quite a bit. Do you care not for your life? That whelp is a merchant of Beim. If he was in the mind for it, he could send those suited for strive.”

Letarta sounded worried, but I just shrugged my shoulders.

“I’m fanning his flames to the borderline, so it’s fine. And he isn’t the sort of person to attack at a time like this.”

Learning I was going to the fort, he was quite delighted at the start. Because he promised backing, a few other merchants sent aid simply because the Trēs House was doing it.

From the katanas left on the table, I took one in hand.

“… I’ll be borrowing one.”

Old Letarta laughed.

“It’s yours regardless.”

Monica had reset her twin tails, and seeing me take a katana, and hang it at my waist, she got quite worked up.

“Chicken Dickwad, how cool!”

She said with both hands in the air. It irritated me, so I pinched her cheeks.

❼

Riding a quilin-form May, I looked at the ground from above.

The entrance of the cave that was once a Labyrinth had spread wide, and from it came one monster after the next. An uninterrupted stream of monsters. The nearby village had already been burned down.

I was watching from afar, so I couldn’t be certain, but that wasn’t the work of monsters.

It felt they had received retribution by human hands.

Behind me, Shannon held onto me with a rope wrapped around her body. She was shaking, and with how high up we were, she was properly wearing a coat.

“Are you cold?”

When I asked, she turned to me.

“I’m scared! Why are you so calm this high in the sky!? Don’t forget the current me can see from the line between us!”

A teary-eyes Shannon was sharing the visual input I took in.

The reason I took her along was that her eyes were necessary for this reconnaissance. My Skills… the Fifth’s Dimension created a three-dimensional map, and on top of that, the information from the Sixth’s Search covered the ground in pure red.

There was no point in counting numbers at this point, but no matter how you looked at it, it wasn’t on a ten thousands scale. Hundreds of

thousands of monsters were coming out of the Labyrinth, their numbers still growing.

May was in quite high spirits, and her bearing was one that might go off to attack at any moment.

“… I don’t have any comrades in this area, but I sent a message, so they should gather after a while. Still, you sure you should just leave it like this?”

Monsters were crowding below my eyes. Their ominous voices reached the sky, and I confirmed the form of a Gryphon.

Not only Orcs and Ogres. I saw a Land Dragon as well.

They weren’t heading in our direction yet, but there were many monsters capable of flight.

One of the greatest fears of a Labyrinth out of control was the fact its army of monsters would never draw back. Its majority would move to attack major human cities, and after destroying them, they’d scatter into the area.

If it were a Labyrinth no one had ever set foot in before, even if it went on a rampage, the scale was kept small. But grown by human hands, a rampaging Labyrinth could produce massive legions upon legions.

And that scale of numbers headed for major settlements without ever stopping, and trampled them to the ground.

“This is a nightmare… May.”

I gripped the Jewel in my left hand, and turned it to the silver Bow. When I moved my body, Shannon clamped on unnecessarily strongly.

High in the sky, I pulled the bow, and produced an arrow of light. From a vague and hazy shape, when it took on the clear form of an arrow, I used a Skill.

“Select…”

With the Second’s Skill, I set my aim on the monsters below.

I wanted to take care of the troublesome monsters beforehand. The one I should crush isn't the Land Dragon. It's the Gryphon.

And the winged monsters.

The monsters they only looked like dots in the distance among them, I locked aim on the ones capable of flight, and fired the arrows.

I hit a foot against May's stomach, and kept firing arrows as she ran.

When I had fired five arrows, the first hit the Gryphon head on. Right after that, the monster's movements accelerated, and the winged monsters on the ground rose, and took to the skies.

A hundred, two, five…

The increasing hoard of flying monsters moved left and right to find us. With them on our tail, we moved right into running away.

I fired the arrows, shooting down around another five monsters, and watched a Gryphon and Hippogryph fall to the ground.

Shannon looked at the monsters, and cried out.

"What are you doing! Now they're chasing us!"

May still found it insufficient.

"You should wipe them out more flashily."

I continued firing at the monsters chasing us, and continued shooting them down. They weren't able to keep up with May's speed as she ran through the air.

But one monster alone…

"Uwah, a troublesome one came out."

I turned to verify the foe May called troublesome.

A black body, with long and yellow wings, a bird-like monster was approaching us at a rapid pace.

Those spread out wings were adorned with red eye-like patterns. As

I looked over those eyes drawing me in, Shannon pinched my face.

“What is it!?”

I held my cheek, and she let go of her right hand.

Shannon looked at me with teary eyes.

“It’s because you were getting sucked in, dammit!”

I didn’t understand why she sounded like she meant it literally, but May explained.

“That’s the sort of monster it is. I’ve forgotten what you humans have gotten to calling it, but before you notice it, you won’t be able to move.”

There, the Third gave me some advice.

『I don’t know it. Is it rare? Well, that aside… Lyle, it’s not like my Skill’s only redeeming feature is its effect on enemies, you know?』

The Third said that, so I recalled and used the Skill… Mind.

It was a Skill that brought about mental interference, so it could block these sorts of psychological attacks.

I got my breathing in order, pulled the bow with all my might, and sent an arrow off at the enemy closing the distance at a breakneck pace.

The enemy took a nose dive to evade, but without dropping speed, the arrow gave pursuit.

“It’s fast.”

“That’s why they’re troubling. Even for quilins, it sometimes eats the little ones.”

As May said that, I tried another arrow. The monster continued avoiding the encroaching arrow, and spun to evade it in midair.

Without hitting its mark, the arrow of light disappeared.

“It dodged right before it hit? This one really is troublesome.”

I fired a third and fourth, and the monster raced around the sky chased from multiple sides. After shaking them off, it started back up in our direction.

Its body was larger than May's, and the talons on its legs looked exceedingly sharp. Black, with purple at the tip, those claws gave off a poisonous feel.

"Those have a strong poison, so watch yourself. Humans can die just from touching that liquid, you know."

Hearing May's counsel, Shannon clung to me, and screamed.

"Why did you take me along!?"

I thought she could do her share of work on recon, but her teary outburst wasn't doing us any good.

I heard Milleia-san's sigh, sending a light chill down my spine.

『Good grief. How can she be so useless when she has the power of those eyes… She's cute, I'll give her that, but she'll need a little… scratch that, a lot of training.』

Hearing that, the Fifth quietly…

『I think Shannon's better as she is, you know.』

Said that.

(How about you guys worry about me too!)

Mildly irritated, I took a deep breath, and drew the bow. With my breathing in order, I glared at the monster atop an accelerating May.

"… Up 'n Down."

When I used the Fourth's Skill, May's speed rose even further. In contrast, the monster's movements suddenly grew dull.

But it used some sort of Skill to brush off that interference.

"This really is a strong one."

Thinking I'd encountered quite a monster, I loaded my mana into the

next shot.

The monster moved to dodge, but the arrow burst on the way, splitting into a few scores of projectiles.

Surrounded, without a place to run, the monster was pierced by dozens of arrows, and split.

It fell to the ground in pieces.

I wiped off my sweat, before probing around to see if there were any monsters of the same sort. There didn't seem to be any, but that was quite a horrible foe to encounter.

And I looked at Shannon clinging to my back. The line had been severed sometime along the way, so I wondered what had happened…

"She lost consciousness with a grip on my clothes."

Seeing the whites of her eyes, I let out a sigh.

13 - Fortress Redant

That place was once a fort.

But now it had become a triple-walled fortress enclosing an army of ten thousands.

Fort Redant, now Fortress Redant had begun to get its shape together.

I gripped the Jewel, riding quilin-form May, as I looked down at the fortress from above. I got a grasp of the area's three dimensional map produced from my Skills, and as I looked at the fortress, I conversed with my ancestors in the Jewel.

At times like these, I'm thankful there's someone like May, who understands the situation.

The Fifth confirmed the fortress.

『Anti-magic defense can just be kept to the surface. We don't have time, so build it with one-time use as the premise. As long as you pour your zeal into the final wall, it's fine if the other two break.』

We smeared the outside with a thin layer of material that reflected Mana. That alone made quite a difference, but it wasn't reliable enough against an army of hundred thousands.

Originally, the entirety of the fortress' construction would be made of material strong to Mana. But we didn't have that sort of time, so the idea was rejected.

I also confirmed the traps. Since it was estimated from the start that the first two walls would be breached, we planned to set traps between them.

The Third looked at the fortress headed for its completion as he spoke.

『Oil, gunpowder, and arrows… it's not enough, but it leaves you with

quite a few means. The problem would have to be the sky.』

It's been said that when facing an army of monsters, the greatest problem becomes the ones that fly through the sky.

I've yet to experience a battle of armies on this scale, but it seems there was a large difference between man and monsters.

The fact that monsters knew no retreat.

If man knew he had no chance of victory, he could step down if he so desired. But monsters had no such concept, pressing forward until the very end.

Because of that, it was possible to catch them with obvious traps. But their ability to break through them was something else.

And of those monsters able to break through most everything, the greatest pain was the flying ones. They pass right over ramparts, and can even attack from the rear.

If they flew up high enough, they were foes difficult to lay hands on. More than anything, if a powerful monster- say a Gryphon- were to land atop the walls, the rank and file soldiers wouldn't be enough to handle it.

I looked in the direction of the fortress, laying in wait for the monster assault.

"We could keep chipping down at them. But I doubt that would actually inflict much damage to their side."

The first time, I borrowed Shannon's eyes to do recon.

And the second trip, I went with May to whittle away the troublesome monsters.

The third time… I rained a few hundred arrows on them, but the monsters specialized in magic were able to block them.

Flying monsters alone made a few thousand, I'm sure. What I defeated wouldn't even make up a hundred of them.

I wanted to keep chipping down at them like this, but I had another

job to do.

“Personally, I’d like to just attack, and crush them. Is there really a need for me to go out of my way to make an appearance? You humans really are obsessive over that sort of thing.”

As May shook her head tiredly, she was linked with Connection, so the Fifth was able to call over to her.

『Please endure it, May. It’s at times like these that morale is more important than all else. Monsters don’t have such a thing, but humans need a will to fight.』

If they didn’t have that, the human side would crumble oh so easily.

No matter how certain I was we could win, that would be pointless if the others didn’t believe that as well.

“Do your best, me!”

Seeing her get so motivated on the Fifth’s words, I gave a bitter smile.

I confirmed the traps on their course.

We had prepared all we could, but the ancestors said that something of this level wouldn’t drop their numbers too much.

According to them, it was just on the level of better than doing nothing. Pitfalls would instantly be filled in, and trampled over. Against a hundred thousand monsters, if the traps put a few thousand to rest, it was only a measurement error.

On top of that, this time’s monster army… the worst part was that it was well balanced.

With airborne forces, and plenty of monsters skilled in magic. I doubt they would have any sort of coordination, but I could already see the sight of them concentrating their magic fire on the fortress.

Not have a fortress built on that land for nothing, there were cliffs around, putting a limit on enemy passage. If I could call that a saving grace, I would.

The Seventh opened his mouth.

『Well, the ones holed in the fortress have the advantage. Though the enemy's more than ten times.』

Thinking just of troop numbers, it looks like they would definitely break through.

"Well, we did whatever we could."

The Fourth nodded favorably.

『Right. You've done pretty much everything you could do in this short period of time. You've turned a fort to a fortress to confront Bahnseim in the future. You've taken in the elves, and had them publicize you as the hero standing against overwhelming odds. Though we could do with a bit more of a fighting force.』

Zayin and Lorphys… we had borrowed soldiers from them.

To those two countries, it was surely a troublesome talk. The upper echelon may be rejoicing over its reduced debt, but to the lower ends, it was simply outrageous.

The mercenaries and adventurer had, to defend their city of Beim, hardened their defenses around the urban center for a defensive war.

We recruited volunteer soldiers from the villages near the border, but they didn't even reach a thousand. If we were to continue gathering them, just how many could we get… what's more, they wouldn't be that useful as soldiers in the first place.

While they had weapons, they hadn't undergone the training of a soldier.

(Well, it's not like our goal is to get them to fight, though.)

At times like these, Beim didn't have to gather its civilians as soldiers. So trying to do so wasn't very productive.

The Third spoke.

『Now then, Lyle. The circumstances are hopeless. It's a mistake to

try and challenge this situation! Anyone would think that.』

“I’m sure they would. But…”

『… That’s the best part!』

I could somehow imagine the Third’s scheming smile in my mind.

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… Beim’s eastern Guild branch.

Behind her receptions counter, Marianne was releasing her wrath.

“I told you no already! Your party isn’t being forced to participate. There’s no meaning in pointlessly throwing down your lives!”

The one she confronted was Erhart. Before the wrath that shattered her usual fluffy atmosphere, the surrounding adventurers, and Erhart’s party looked quite confused.

Her fellow receptionists were also looking at her in shock.

“B-but Marianne-san. We’ve already gotten all our equipment in order… and if we join in, there will be a reward. If we work outside the city, the sum we’ll get springs right up.”

Even the usually stubborn Erhart was stumbling over his words in front of Marianne’s anger.

“Because you’ve only just gotten your equipment together, you think you’ve become first-rate? Just stop it right there. Listen here, if you keep thinking like that, you’re definitely going to die! All you’ve done up to now is odd jobs, and you’ve occasionally hunted monsters outside in the space between them. So how strong have you gotten in a couple of months? Do you really understand that?”

Her role was to offer kind words to new recruits, but this time the individual herself had forgotten her own job.

Erhart spoke.

“W-what’s with you? We’re no chopped liver! You’re the one who said we had talent, aren’t you!?”

Marianne looked down, and bit her lower lip. She clenched her fist, and she felt she was about to cry, but she endured, and made the most repulsive smile she could muster.

“I’d say it to anyone. It’s not like you lot were special or anything. There are plenty adventurers of your caliber around. Because some petty praise was enough to make you do the jobs no one wanted, I merely dealt with you amiably.”

Stroking her hair, she turned a mocking smile to Erhart’s party.

“S-so that’s how you’ve been thinking of us up to now!? We were truly thankful for you, Marianne-san, and we wanted to…”

“Hah? Don’t get so stuck up. And what of it? Now go pick a job you’re actually capable of already, and don’t get in the way of my work, won’t you?”

What Marianne proceeded to hand Erhart was a manual labor request for building up the city’s defenses. A non-combatant role.

Erhart’s party hung their heads. Of his comrades, there was even one letting his tears flow.

The words of their kind and reliable elder sister-like existence had brought about a terrible shock.

Erhart silently signed the document, before crushing it in his hand, and slamming it down on the table.

“… I believed in you.”

Marianne filed that form with a shameless attitude, and handed an envelope over. And after snatching it from her hands, Erhart’s party left the counter.

Seeing them like that, Marianne lowered her shoulders in relief.

Tanya immediately came to Marianne’s side.

“Marianne, you’ve been summoned.”

Thinking she'd really screwed up, Marianne made a hazy smile as she stood, and proceeded straight to her superior's room.

Tanya took over the counter in her stead, and kept the adventurers company…

❼

… The superior's room.

Hearing Marianne's report of the circumstances, the supervisor didn't seem all too angry.

"Marianne, I had thought you more clever than that. If they wish for it, what harm is there in sending an adventurer party or two to the front lines? It's nothing you should feel responsible for."

Marianne cast her eyes down.

As she reported to her boss, he was smiling ever-so-slightly.

"You're… right. Even so, when I watch over them, my feelings boil up. Those children still have futures ahead of them. Letting them die here is…"

Perhaps her superior understood her sentiment, as he let out a sigh.

"It's precisely because you're like that, that you're in charge of the new recruits. But today's matter will spread in an instant. Since you played the bad guy to stop them, it will become a hindrance to your work. So from here on, I'll be having you man the desks on the third floor. No more newbies for you… do your best in your new post."

On her superior's words, Marianne felt like crying again. Not from joy. But as she felt they were about to come out, she held a hand to her mouth.

"… Thank you very much. I shall get right to it."

After giving such a reply, she left the room…

❼

… With her work reaching a good point to go off shift, Tanya headed for the break room, and ran into Rühe.

“Ah, good work, Tanya-san!”

Bright and energetic, she took a bit of an oversized attitude towards her superiors, but she knew not to do that to those she couldn’t oppose at all costs.

And she was skillfully spending her days at this workplace.

“Likewise. How are things going on your end?”

When Tanya sat and asked, Rühe gave a delighted smile.

“We’ve safely managed to get adventurers to dispatch to the important points outside the city. The reward was a good one, and if I was the one asking, then… they said.”

Seeing her speak so pleasantly, Tanya recalled. Still young, the generation that hadn’t experienced the last rampaging Labyrinth.

That was the age Rühe was part of.

“… So when I asked an adventurer I knew really well, he took it on! Said there was something he wanted to tell me when he got back!”

From Rühe’s attitude, it seems she got on considerably well with that adventurer. And hearing that, the veteran receptionists sent eyes of sympathy her way.

Tanya had a general estimate of what sort of man that adventurer was. An adventurer classified as proficient, but in the sense of how the Guild perceived him, that was.

If you were to ask him if he was really strong, he would only shake his head.

Rühe struck up a conversation with Marianne.

“Even so, could it be you’ve finally reached your limit? Those sorts of

adventurers with nothing but ulterior motives on their mind really do send the vilest of glances, after all. You have my sympathy."

What Tanya, and the other senior adventurers remembered as they looked at Rühe, was Marianne.

When she had only just become a receptionist, she had been beautiful and kind, and popular. And with all the flattery she received, she had taken on a Rühe-esque behavior.

Tanya thought.

(I do pray you don't become the second Marianne, Rühe.)

As the Guild was moving around busily, Tanya felt a form of generation shift taking place in the office…

❼

Redant Fortress.

As I stood on a high point of the structure, there were flags around. There was one of Beim, but around it were the flags of Zayin, Lorphys… and the Walt House as well.

That flag that took after the Blue Jewel being hung from its silver ornaments was something I made of my own accord.

Wearing blue armor I had a smith finish up, I held my helmet under my right arm, and turned.

The numbers we'd gathered were just over twenty six thousand. It was lower than estimated, but I thought that couldn't be helped.

And as the morning sun rose, I saw a black shadow on the other side of the horizon. An army of monsters.

"Gentlemen! I'm sure a majority of you are thinking this: 'Why is it that we must bet our lives for the likes of Beim?' …. 'Why should we listen to the orders of a whelp like me' …"

I wrung out a loud voice, holding out my left hand. The armed army

remained in silence.

“This fight. It truly is only for Beim’s benefit. Beim is moving with the breach of this fortress as a premise. Refusing my call to dispatch adventurers, they concentrate their powers on defense of the city, and only send adventurers and mercenaries to the points they deem important!”

Yes, quite a terrible tale there. Of course, I’m sure Beim had a lot they’d want to say in response, but there wasn’t anyone from Beim here, so that wasn’t a problem.

I didn’t lie either.

“It truly is unfair. You who pledged your lives to your motherlands are to fight for the sake of some other nation… but is it really alright to abandon Beim!? Is it really right to watch Beim’s suffering from the sidelines!? It isn’t just Beim who shall be unreasonably trampled down by monsters! All the people who live on these lands shall suffer the same fate! And I cannot permit that!”

From the Jewel, I heard the Fourth’s voice.

『Yep, looking good. You’ve got to make a grand proclamation here on how you’re different from Celes.』

Milleia-san chimed in to shoot him down.

『Even if they’re different, this is still quite dubious. He isn’t lying, but he isn’t giving the whole truth either.』

This address… it’s not like it was only directed to the soldiers alone. More than that, it was meant for Beim’s civilians that we had gathered here.

I’m working hard, but Beim abandoned you, is the point I’m trying to appeal.

As I continued the address, I pulled a sword that looked the part from my waist. It wasn’t a katana, but a double edged sword for appearance’s sake. I pointed it at the heavens, and wrung out my voice.

“If fate is to lie in this plight of mine, the goddesses will surely answer to it! Here I swear, I will protect this point for the sake of the people to be trampled underfoot!”

At the moment, May raced down from the sky in her quilin form. The soldiers looking up watched the quilin, and raised their voices.

“O-oy! It’s a quilin!”
“No way. Could this really be fate…”
“It couldn’t be, no it has to be…”
“We can win. We can win this!”
“Yeah, there’s a quilin on our side!”

(As expected of the symbol of good fortune.)

I had concealed her existence up to now, but opted to use it here.

Favorable opinions started to come out. Naturally, they were shills. The ancestors didn’t loosen their hands on these finer preparations.

As May descended to my side, the soldiers raised cheers of joy. I could see the morale rising before my eyes. And I felt their heat was even going to reach me up here.

“We have the grace of the goddess! Our fortress of Redant shall be the graveyard of those vile legions! Just follow my lead!”

When I raised my voice, the voices of soldiers calling my name overlapped a few ten thousand times, creating something quite magnificent.

(Damn, deceiving them leaves a bad taste in my mouth.)

I loathed myself for performing this morale raising address.

14 - Valkyrie

The fortress' wall.

The center portion of the first wall was made a little elevated.

It was for the sake of showing everyone the form of me taking command, but originally, I wanted to give orders from the rear.

That would've been more efficient, and as long as I stationed my comrades with Connection at the important points, the relay of information would be just as fast.

But there was a meaning to this positioning.

With the encroaching army of monsters before us, I threw my right arm up front, and wrung out my voice.

"Fire!"

It wasn't just soldiers atop the wall. Knights, and magicians were deployed. Speaking to numbers, the scale was around three thousand.

From atop the wall, magic was fired at the monsters coming our way.

Powerful magics drilled into them one after another, and my sights were blinded by the lights and explosions. Bangs and dust clouds rose, dyeing the surroundings light brown with sand.

But quilin form May standing beside me raised her head a little.

"They're coming."

Crushed into the dirt, the monsters the magic had taken down were trampled over by the others, who continued their march. As the monster emerged from the cloud of dirt, a cannon stationed at the center of the wall fired a round.

Atop the wall, I had the magicians stand down, to have lines of

soldiers with bows and crossbows take their place.

The site commanders each gave their orders to fire, and arrows pierced into the enemies.

From the Jewel, the Fifth let his voice.

『It's a situation where as long as you shoot, you'll probably hit something. Rather than waiting to aim, just keep attacking one after the next. Get in some magic with moderation. Before you can fire your next magic, then enemy will also…』

Before the Fifth could finish, from the monster army, staff toting Goblins and Orcs, and ominous robed monsters floating in the air… Reptilian monsters opened their large mouths; magic and breath attacks were about to come our way.

I swung my left hand from the front to the side, and gave orders to Miranda and Eva.

"Prepare to defend. The points of attack are…"

I identified several large portions of the wall, and had them deploy Magic Shield there to defend them. We didn't have enough magicians to cover the entire wall, and more than that, it would be an intense expenditure.

Magic fired from the army of monsters, and long range attacks came at the wall.

Those were pinpointed, and precisely blocked. Even when they pierced through the shields, the walls' surface had special anti-magic material painted over it.

They could easily stand an attack or two.

Looking up at the sky, I called out to May.

"May, I'll leave it to you. I'll support you from below as well."

"Hmhmm! So it's finally my turn!"

May raced into the sky, at the flock of flying monsters closing in on the fortress.

Hippogryphs and Gryphons. And small bird-shaped monsters began to gather around her.

Gripping the Jewel in my left hand, I turned its shape to the bow, and took a stance.

Firing some arrows at the sky, a few dozen small projectiles rained down on those flying buggers. Since May was there, I only had to take care of the small fries.

But it wasn't a problem that could be suppressed with just me and May alone, and those flying monsters crossed over the wall one after the next.

In the air, May let off a pale blue lightning from the golden pair of horns growing on her head, blowing the monsters around her away.

As monster fell to the ground one after the next, I heard Eva's voice.

『Lyle, the preparations are complete over here. Ready anytime.』

I checked in with Miranda.

『Miranda?』

And after waiting a little, Miranda's gave her response.

『They concentrated fire on my side in that last attack. Wait a bit.』

I was in the center, Miranda on the right, and Eva had been charged with the left side. When I was about to wait for her, the Fifth immediately spoke up.

『Have both sides fire. They're still coming. Adapt yourself to overcome.』

Hearing his advice, I relayed information through Eva on the left.

『Fire first. Miranda, fire as soon as you're ready.』

The magicians and knights on the left stepped forward, and each fired their strongest magics. The impact seemed to be even lower than before.

But once Miranda was prepared, a consecutive stream of considerable large-scale magic drove into the enemy.

This time, however, there were monsters with Magic Shield deployed, so the damage looked much less than it had been before.

“I had thought of alternating fire between both sides, but it looks like the output is too low for that.”

Thinking of how we wouldn’t be able to blow away, I confirmed the enemy was preparing to use long-range attacks, and immediately gave the orders to defend.

❼

… The second wall.

At the fortress’ front, a position you could call the center if looked upon as a whole, Aria was on standby.

Battle had already begun on the front-most line, and the explosive sounds of magic reached all the way to her ears. Looking up at the sky, she could see May taking down a number of monsters.

Leaning her spear over her shoulder, Aria atop the wall spoke.

“That Lyle… they’re already breaking through, aren’t they?”

Beside Aria, Alette Baillet- dispatched from Lorphys- stood in her armor with her helmet in her hands.

“Good grief. A commander isn’t to show those sorts of emotions, young lady. It’s best you watch your words.”

Receiving such lamentations, Aria repented, closed her mouth, and watched the scenery between the first and second walls. There was quite a bit of distance between them, and they had already carried out preparations to meet the monsters.

But the skies weren’t Aria’s responsibility.

“It’s work time, Monica.”

When she turned, and said that to Monica, Aria looked over the automaton's appearance.

From her back, white spider leg-like repulsing metal somethings were weighing down her body.

Hearing those words, despite how she looked, Monica lowered her shoulders.

"Even when I'm the more useful one… hah, it really is time for work, I see."

Saying that, she looked up at the sky, and spread out both arms before bringing them to her chest. The eight arm- or perhaps leg-mechanisms moved, and let off flickering red lights.

And the monsters in the sky began dropping to the ground one after the next.

Seeing that scene, Alette spoke.

"So why wasn't she stationed on the front line then?"

She sounded exceedingly curious. But Monica merely lowered her shoulders again.

"Yes, and that's the end of it. I leave the remaining monsters to the rest of you."

And with those words, she had lost her last fragment of motivation.

Aria looked up, and saw that three Hippogryphs still remained.

"It's surely nice for dispersing the small fries, but if they have some resistance to it, there's no point. What's more, if she uses it too much, then Lyle would be in trouble."

Aria explained its restrictions to Alette, and Alette looked at Monica.

"So that's why she's in the rear. But it's still plenty amazing."

There was quite a bit of distance. And it had taken care of the monsters flying through the sky in an instant. Monica's specs were something unbelievable to Alette.

The Hippogryphs turned to Monica, who'd defeated their comrades. When soldiers armed with guns gathered, Damien came out on the wall.

"Oh my, isn't that perfect? There's a perfect three test subjects coming right for us."

As he grinned, Damien was leading around his three maids, and wearing casual clothing. It was a spectacle quite mismatched to the battlefield, but if it was Damien, it couldn't be helped, and the surroundings had given up.

Automaton maids No. 1 through 3 were carrying a coffin-like case along the wall.

Aria sent a doubtful look Damien's way.

"Will they really be useful?"

Aria and Damien didn't get along too well, but this time Damien was smiling.

"I guarantee they'll be more useful and beautiful than you, at least. Now then, the preparations are all in order, and they should already have a line with Lyle, so how about we get to activating them already?"

An unmotivated Monica approached the coffins the maids had left on the floor. As the coffin shook, she gave a cynical laugh.

"Degraded versions of me? I alone am plenty for that Chicken Dickhead, but I'll do the honor, and work you all to the bone. Still, it will be troublesome if they're left unnamed. Right! From today onwards, you shall be Poyopoyo 2.0, Poyopoyo 3.0, and Poyopoyo 4.0! Now wake the hell u–"

… Wake the hell up.

That was what Monica had attempted to say, when a mechanical fist pierced through the lid of the coffin, and impacted her square in the head.

"Y-you scrap metal heaps!!"

From the space between her skirt and apron, Monica retrieved a spanner, and began swinging it about. And Aria looked on with a tired expression.

Damien's maid No. 2 watched Monica with a faint smile on her face as she positioned herself out of attack range. And while she did that, three golems emerged from the casket.

Heads just like that of a human girl, and torsos to match. From their shoulders to their thighs, they looked perfectly human. But from there on, they were equipped with mechanical limbs. Over their bodies, they wore slightly-flashy armor of blue and white.

Aria had already seen those bodies in the storehouse of the mansion, but she still had trouble believing it.

"Are those really golems?"

Alette was considerable surprised as well.

"It's a bit unbelievable. They look like humans themselves."

Damien spoke in delight.

"Because that's exactly what I was aiming for! This time, I've produced some worthwhile results. It's impossible for me to thank Lyle enough! Now then, you guys… it's work time."

When Damien told them to work, the three golems… the【Valkyries】raised their faces. The blond-haired Valkyrie in the center had pigtails, and red eyes. Her appearance was considerably different to the other golems, of whom had straight, long hair.

If nothing else, she barely had any chest to speak of. While the other two were properly equipped.

But the Golems…

"I've no need to listen to your orders."
"Bring out the master. Our master, if you will."
"I am quite against this sort of awakening."

Unlike Monica, their tones were a little stiff, and they had

immediately rejected Damien's orders.

Seeing that, Monica hid her mouth with her hand.

"What's with these piles of junk? They're completely useless characters, are they not? I'll go report it to the Chicken Dickwad. Dear Chicken, your trump cards have already refused to fight."

As Monica joyously reported to Lyle, the blond twin-tailed… the Valkyrie with an appearance quite resembling her own approached with a long stride, and drove her fist in.

"My hand has slipped. A malfunction. A malfunction."

"Y-you heap of juuuunnk!! I'll scrap you on the spot!"

Monica took a stance with her spanner, while the Valkyries raised their faces.

"From that previous conversation, I am to assume the enemy is those Hippogryph… affirmative. We will show the extent of our ability."

On the backs of those blue and white wings, were mechanical, wing-like contraptions.

Alette sent some eyes of expectation.

"C-can they fly!?"

There, Damien scoffed.

"Hah? No way in hell they can fly. Are you an idiot?"

As Alette looked at Damien with quite a blank expression, the Valkyries confirmed their own right arms.

The twin tailed unit seemed to be the leader of the three.

"No bugs detected. Then… onward."
"Yes."
"It is our first campaign. Let us believe our master is watching us, and do our best."

(Didn’t she just say something about a malfunction or… whatever.)

When the three units extended their right arms to the sky, the portion from their upper arms onwards split, shot out, and grabbed the Hippogryphs in the sky..

Wires were fastened to their arms, and those wires were hoisting up the Valkyries on the ground.

But some claw-like furnishings on their feet pierced into the ground.

“Obediently get down from there.”

On those words, the Hippogryphs flailed about in futility as the Valkyries pulled them down… from the wing-like storage boxes on their backs, they took out their weapons.

Taking out spears, they stuck them right into the incoming Hippogryphs. Stained with the blood spurt, the three Valkyrie units pulled their spears from the defeated Hippogryphs.

Seeing that, Aria…

“Uwah, no way.”

Said that. Monica turned to Aria…

“You’re not much different, you know.”

❼

–

It seems the Valkries were able to deal with the second wall.

I had registered myself as their masters on their cores in advance, but because of that, a line had been formed, and information was relayed to me.

“So Damien’s group was able to do it. Even so, letting a few go passed wouldn’t be much of a problem…”

I looked at the scene before my eyes, and breathed out a sigh.

“It doesn’t look like their numbers are going down at all.”

There, from the Jewel came the Third’s voice.

『It really has only just begun, after all. You’ll be dealing with them quite plainly from here on. It’ll be quite a while before you can do a flashy sweep.』

We had a number of plans prepared. But it wasn’t yet the time to use them.

A consecutive stream of arrows, and magic.

And meeting with the stream of magic and long ranged attacks from the enemy, the battlefield had become an intense exchange of blows.

A monsters that didn’t even flinch at the impact of magic had begun attacking the wall.

It was a Troll. A giant covered in a dense coat of hair swung a log around, trying to break down the wall. It didn’t recoil at arrows or magic, so I took a stance with the silver bow in its long-bow form.

I set my aim on the Troll’s head, and when I fired an arrow, its head was blown off, with its body collapsing on the ground. As it fell, it crushed a number of smaller monsters with it, but the surrounding monsters stepped over the Troll’s body to aim for the wall.

I won’t say for certain, but I can’t think that humans could be this single-mindedly driven.

“So this is a Labyrinth out of control.”

The Fifth heard my mutterings.

『That’s about right. Well, there are quite a few countries that have fallen to such an onslaught. Personally, I still think humans are the scarier ones.』

Listening to the Fifth’s words, I checked over my own Mana supply.

As the control tower, if I ran out of Mana, we would instantly be at a disadvantage. Having to avoid that alone by all means, I couldn’t fight

the monsters before us with all my might.

At that moment, I heard Miranda's voice.

『Lyle, ready anytime.』

Eva as well.

『Here too.』

Before I could tell them to begin their attack…

"The enemy's launching theirs first. Everything… no, doesn't look like we can cover that. Pinpoint and protect only the important points."

… As I felt an intense light from the enemy forces, a number of powerful magics were shot at the fortress.

Perhaps thinking it too much, May descended before me, and stood up front.

An explosion rang out before my eyes, and the deployed Magic Shield was easily blown off. Damage started to surface on our side.

A portion of the wall had begun to crumble, and casualties were coming out in the soldiers atop it.

I turned my right hand to the front.

"Payback in kind… Fire!!"

Our magic shot in retribution came down on the monster legion. And like that, with this sort of magic back and forth, the first day had come to an end.

15 - Retreat

The third day.

On the third day since this defensive war was initiated, the first wall had become quite tattered.

Our return fire slackened during the night, but it's not like they weren't attacking us.

We had prepared three squadrons of three thousand, and had them work on rotation, but our limit was approaching.

Many soldiers and knights had been sent to the back lines from injury.

By the point close to half had to step down, our limit had arrived.

What's more, that number included logistic support. Not just combatants, a number of supports had to retreat to the back.

Granted, the majority of those stepping down were our main fighting forces.

Unsteady on his feet, the captain of Zayin's Holy Knight Brigade Noy-san came to give me a report.

His expression wasn't the best, and he looked like he'd collapse at any moment.

"We're at our limits. We should abandon this post."

Hearing the words of an unsteady and dispirited Noy-san, I nodded with a tired expression.

Using Damien's large-scale Porter, Clara was transporting troops and supplies, but we decided to pull back the cannons already.

I told Clara to put a hold on the supply chain, and pick up the cannons. But in that case, enemies could break the wall and flow in while we were moving it.

“We’re moving into preparations to withdraw the cannons. Wake everyone up. And let some of the troublesome monsters through.”

I had some preparations of my own to make, so I watched over an unsteady Noy-san, before calling out for May.

“May, it’s almost your turn.”

Lying down in human form, she looked considerably exhausted.

“… Got it.”

Rubbing her eyes, and raising herself sluggishly, she put a hand against the wall to stand up. Even a divine beast such as herself was showing such signs of exhaustion.

From the Jewel, the Fifth let his voice. For some reason, he sounded moved.

『May, you’re working so hard…』

Thinking that I should be on the receiving end of such an evaluation as well, I looked at the sky, with the morning sun just barely beginning to rise.

We had put up a small, and plain defensive up to now, but from here on, it was going to get a little difficult.

Turning to look at the second wall, I…

“It’s even earlier than I thought.”

… Let out such a complaint.

❼

… Morning.

On the third day, the abandonment of the first wall was determined, or so Clara came to inform the second stronghold.

Moving frequently between the fortress and frontlines, Clara had bags under her eyes.

Aria awoke in a room within the second wall, and confirmed Lyle's order from Clara.

"Didn't he say it'd hold for five days, at least?"

Clara looked over Aria's drowsiness with envy.

"There has been a change of plans. And it seems there numbers were even greater than anticipated. Even Eva's been rendered immobile, after all."

Eva had already withdrawn to the fortress.

With only Miranda and Lyle holding out, and more than half of the troops at the first stronghold falling back, they no longer had the means to maintain that point.

After Aria got up, she went into preparing herself.

"I just have to go out is all, right? We're already prepared on our side."

Clara transmitted the information she obtained from watching the front lines.

"The extra-large monsters are gathering. Please be careful."

The powerful monsters that had started out in the rear, with the army that couldn't move a foot, they had crushed the lesser creatures in their way underfoot to make their ways to the front.

Land Dragons and Trolls, and large monsters like Ogres.

The figure of a Sand Golem had been confirmed as well, and talks had proceeded towards purposely letting those sorts of monsters pass through.

Aria changed her clothes, and left the room.

"Now then, it's our turn."

Taking a stretch, she set about getting ready. Seeing her back, Clara hurriedly returned to the fortress, transmitted Lyle's orders, and prayed for her next rest.

(The problem with Lyle-san's Connection is how it gets cut the moment you fall asleep. And that I'm the only one on messenger duty.)

Clara wasn't the only one capable of manipulating golems, but neither Lyle nor Damien had a thing for kissing guys.

Both their opinions aligned, and Damien had work to do, so it couldn't be helped that messaging was left to Clara.

(Hah, if the first wall is breached, we'll just be moving to the second wall… but the frequency will surely increase. Wouldn't anyone do? Just teach someone else golem magic already.)

Clara wanted to return to the fortress, and flop onto a bed at once. But therein lay the problem.

(The fortress is a hell of its own, so whether one can rest in peace or not is… as I thought, we must secure personnel with all due haste.)

It was a good thing she had work to do, but Clara wanted to do something about the situation where she was the only one for that job…

❼

Between wall and wall, there was a wide space…

It was to combat the monsters that breached through. There was an incline to the space, and it was made in a way to put the invading side at a disadvantage.

Barricades of mud were erected, and the preparations to counterattack were in place.

With Aria at the head, Lorphys's side had Alette, and her deputy officer in command.

Meanwhile, Zayin had the vice-captain combo of Creit and Albano participating.

None of them were mounted, as they stood in file, and waited for the monsters to come.

Around Aria, the Valkyries stood as guards. Alette called over.

“Now then, I can’t wait to see how you do, little lady. You’re the commander here.”

She said that to Aria in jest. But Aria…

“All we have to do is defeat the enemies before us, right?”

That’s all she said.

There, Albano burst into laughter in response.

“No doubt about that! ‘Cuz this mish-mash hasn’t coordination or anything to speak of.”

Creit drew closer to him.

“What do you speak of in such an important time!”

“What? Wanna go at it, rock-head!?”

Seeing the belligerent two, Alette, and her adjutant shook their heads.

“And you two haven’t changed at all. You’ve become vice-captains. How about mellowing out a bit?”

There, a colored smoke rose from the first wall. It was the signal beacon.

“It’s time.”

Alette looked at Aria.

When Aria nodded, she issued orders to her squadron. And seeing that, Albano and Creit took command of their forces as well.

A squadron of five thousand was going to fight under Aria’s command.

Aria put power into her hand.

Looking forward, she could see the first wall's gate slowly rising in the distance.

And as if a sea wave had closed in on the coast, the monsters began their assault.

They weren't a flock of Goblins or such small fries; they were all giants. She could make out the form of a Land Dragon among them.

And one of the Valkyries called out to her.

"Preparations complete."

Aria nodded, before turning her spear towards the encroaching wave of monsters.

"The enemy is coming. Roll!"

On her voice, the soldiers turned barrels on their sides, and ignited their fuses. Using the incline to send them rolling, they sent a large number of barrels towards the monster army.

At the first wall, allies used magic to blow away some monsters, and quickly closed the gate.

The Valkyries beside Aria spoke up.

"Numerically, I have to say around three thousand. The enemy's elite have flooded in quite splendidly."
"Master is amazing."
"It is time for us to stand out, and appeal our worth to him."

Containing her urge to put a hand to her head, Aria looked straight ahead.

A three thousand that didn't even reach ten percent of the enemy's total forces. But looking at quality alone, even among monsters, they were of quite the strong variant.

If they were to all concentrate their attacks on it, perhaps the first wall really wouldn't be able to handle it.

A majority of the barrels were swallowed up by the flood of monsters, exploding in their midst, and lowering their numbers.

The Valkyries again.

“Second camp ready.”
“They have fallen for it quite splendidly.”
“It is a victory for gunpowder. But the dragons are not stopping. How unfair.”

Even with barrels full of gunpowder exploding, the Dragons and giant Trolls didn’t falter. Things of Ogre level were blown off their feet, but they still tried to get back up.

When the second camp let their barrels roll, a large Lizard opened its mouth, and tried to attack.

Aria’s group hid in a nearby cavity to avoid it.

A large mass of flames slammed into the second wall, but…

The twin tailed Valkyrie offered a line.

“How unfortunate. It has been reinforced.”

The flames dispersed. Unlike the first wall, the second boasted an increased strength.

When more explosions rang out, blowing more monsters away, Aria took up her weapon, and exited the trench. The Valkyries leapt out as well, each with a weapon in hand.

Allies also showed themselves from the trench, beginning their attacks with bows and crossbows.

The Land Dragon rushing up the incline blocked bolts with its hard skin, as it advanced.

“This is the end of the line.”

Aria slipped into the space right below its neck, swung her spear, and let out a shockwave.

Its head fell to the floor, while the Valkyries also used their weapons to take down a Troll. Cutting it down, and letting it fall, they shot out their arms in search of their next pray, and grabbed hold of another Troll. Unlike with the Hippogryph, they freely retracted their wires to

transport themselves to the enemy.

And using that momentum, they cut the monsters down.

Their movements so as not to be bathed in the blood spurt was as if they were dancing.

Aria avoided the lowered log of a Troll, jumped onto, and ran up it to send her spear through its head.

Hopping off the collapsing Troll, her red armor was dyed even deeper in monster blood.

Using her longsword to cut down the surrounding Orcs and Ogres in an instant, Alette looked upon the scene.

“Truly daring, that lass. I’d like to recruit her myself.”

Her adjutant gave the orders for her subordinates to get the monsters gathering around her in order.

“We are short on personnel, after all. Makes me remember back when we were just scraping by. But right now…”

Alette held up her sword, and made a faint smile.

“I know…【Multi-Airblade】.”

She swung it, producing invisible blades of wind, cutting down monster after monster before her eyes.

It was a Skill particularly useful for dealing with foes in close formation, and one that allowed her party to deal with a large number of monsters.

There, a monster began to prepare large-scale magic.

“How troublesome. We’re retreating back to the trench at once.”

When Alette said that, a single knight raced out, and used a Skill.

It was Creit.

“How about you leave this to me!【Allshield】.”

Creit held up the spear in his hand, manifesting a number of large shields, and blocking the enemy's attack. It blocked both physical attacks and magic, and even put a stop to enemy advances.

Alette looked at Creit.

"Couldn't you have used it earlier!? And if you had something like that, then say so beforehand!"

She complained.

In any case, she had never heard that Creit possessed such a useful Skill. At most, she thought he was able to put up a shield to protect a party.

Raising a grand laugh, Creit…

"I'm growing by the day, you know!"

Even with anger directed his way, he wasn't dispirited…

❼

After disposing of the elite monsters we had invited in, we withdrew from the first wall.

There were quite a few knights and soldiers dragging their bodies, and with our fatigue, our movement speed was down.

My own retreat had May's assistance, so I was the last in line, and I also had to confirm the destruction of the stronghold.

I had the Skills to verify there was no one left behind, and as the one in charge, I wanted to hold the image of the reliable one who stayed behind to the end.

It's image tactics.

Something you really couldn't make light of.

In war, the commander should be stationed at the rear. And that was the type of commander I was, but if I did that from the start, there

would be a problem.

I had few achievements, so the soldiers were anxious.

No matter how capable the commander may be, a majority of soldiers were normal commoners. Even among knights, there were some who looked down on a commander who didn't go out front, so what would happen if a greenhorn like me was to take up a rear position?

The one to teach me that was the Seventh.

I could understand if it were the Third, but it seems such a trend was strong in the Seventh's time as well.

『Yes, truly a perfect commander play. On the front lines at the offense, and the last one to retreat. This alone can encourage the troops.』

The Fourth sounded reluctant.

『If we wanted to prioritize efficiency, Lyle should've been stationed at the center. But with image building in mind, we'll have to milk it.』

As I wished they'd worry a little more for me, the soldiers finished pulling out with the assistance of Aria's forces.

"Looks like we made it in time."

The first wall swayed from the attacks of monsters. A magic flew my way, so I held up my left hand, and blocked it with a Magic Shield.

Crumbling all over, the first stronghold felt like it would give way at any moment.

"You've fulfilled your role perfectly. Thank you."

Saying that, I straddled myself over quilin-form May, and rode her into the sky. My Mana was at its limits, so there was little I would do.

I was lacking in sleep, and my physical state wasn't at its peak.

It pained me, but I had to buy time for my allies' retreat.

Soaring through the air, I confirmed that my comrades were a good distance away, before taking a stance with the silver bow. The arrow had some fire cast on the tip.

“So I’m sorry.”

When I shot the arrow into the wall’s insides, the gunpowder storage caught fire, and the wall exploded.

It didn’t flashily burst apart, I felt it crumble quite slowly.

The monsters clinging to the crumbling wall were dragged in and crushed.

From the sky, I unsteadily watched over it.

May spoke.

“Our allies have reached the second wall.”

On her words, I collapsed over her back.

“Then, please… carry me there too. If possible, make sure not to drop me.”

Milleia-san spoke in regards to my conduct.

『I’d really like if he could be reliable to the end… well, it’s Lyle we’re talking about, after all.』

She seemed weary, but I think I work hard.

(I wonder if it would be alright to get a bit of a higher evaluation here.)

16 - The Second Wall

Abandoning the first wall ahead of schedule, I unsteadily hobbled into a room prepared in the second wall, and collapsed.

On top of the bed, I cast off my equipment, lay down, and closed my eyes. Soldiers were running about within the wall, and the preparations to wait for the army of monsters were being carried out. The soldiers that had returned were taking up their new stations.

Those that were forced to fall back were taking a temporary rest.

Having used too much Mana, and strained my mind too much on the front line, I was also at my limits. I was sticky with sweat. The dust clouds stuck fast to my skin, with a rough feel… but without paying mind to something like that, I collapsed on the bed.

The fight with the monster army did weigh on my mind, but if I didn't rest, I would never be able to demonstrate power.

In such a room of mine, I heard a boisterous voice.

The door was slammed open with good momentum, to reveal an energetic smiling Monica, and three armored people… no golems behind her.

"Hey, Chicken Dickhead! I, Monica! Your Monica has come to look after you! Feel free to lash out your carnal desires that have built up on the high strung battlefield at me! The perfect maid Monica shall…"

"Out with thee."

Before she could finish, she was kicked out of the way, and the golem that resembled her… the first Valkyrie unit stood before me.

"It is my pleasure to be of your acquaintance. We are the Valkyrie Series that shall follow you to your death. We are master's servants, who shall surely be much more useful than this piece of junk~."

She swung her arms expressionlessly, and the three units assumed poses. The first unit had the same blond hair, and red eyes as Monica. Their appearances were alike, and I had the feeling I had met her when Octō abducted me in the Labyrinth. She had the traces of Monica's elder sister.

The greatest difference between her and the automaton would have to be the chest.

The three units changed their poses.

"Twin Tailed Unit One!"
"Black Haired Beauty, Unit Two!"
"When I am of the same make as Unit Two, just what do you expect me to do? … Then ponytails it is. Black Haired Ponytail Unit Three! A beauty with a ponytail to boot!"

Unit Three swiftly assumed a ponytail, but while I raised my eyes to them, my face was still buried in my pillow.

When Monica stood, she had drills equipped to both her hands. A low sound reverberated through the room, and even if I wanted to sleep them away, I couldn't do it.

"You degraded heaps of scrap metal! Don't be flirting with my Chicken Dickwad. I'll dismantle you on the spot!!"

Monica faced the three golems, taking out her weapon and taking a stance. I threw the pillow.

"Shut it, all of you! I'm going to sleep!"

Saying that, I wrapped the blanket around myself sending the three Valkyries into a panic. And recovering the pillow, and collecting up my equipment, Monica spoke.

"You heard him, now you worthless pieces of junk made for nothing but battle can go off and scram. I alone am more than enough for that damn chicken."

The feeling of my consciousness being sucked away, and the vibrations implying the monsters had reached the wall.

A voice came from the Jewel.

It was Milleia-san's gentle voice.

『Good grief… Lyle, send your consciousness over here for a bit.』

❼

… While the first wall had been holding out, the surface of the second wall was being smeared with layer after layer of special material.

Alette issued orders atop the wall, as she watched the scene before her eyes.

This point was the same as the fortress in the rear.

The first wall was made with its destruction as the premise. But in order to withstand the monster army, the second wall had been constructed much sturdier.

The wall was high, and close to eight thousand troops were stationed there.

Those numbers included Aria, Alette, and her adjutant. Creit and Albano, all the talents were gathered.

And Damien was at the second wall as well. With his automatons and golems, he was reliable enough as a fighting force.

The monsters had begun their attack on such a wall.

From its top, arrows were fired and magic was fired, as the human side put up an intense resistance. But in a state where Lyle was absent, they couldn't put their resources to the optimum use.

Where to defend, and where to aim.

While protecting a much burlier wall, the opposition was quite mismatched.

At that site, Alette was acting as Aria's support.

“Quite a few troublesome monsters. After defeating so many, for there to be so many more.”

In regards to the Troll grappling with the gate, those around blasted magic into it. But the result was clearly overkill.

It wasn’t the fault of Aria, who had been left the commanding position, Lyle was simply too far out there.

He had a grasp of the whole, and the speed of his information relay was abnormal. Mastering the command of a number of Support Class Skills, his orders were precise as well.

“It would’ve been best if he was just commanding from the fortress.”

She knew it wasn’t possible, but a battlefield without Lyle became divided in an instant.

Zayin’s knights and soldiers would surely follow his orders. He was the hero that reclaimed the country with only a hundred men. Their civilians would likely fight for him as well. That was just how high his popularity was in Zayin.

But the knights and soldiers of Lorphys were different.

They felt a debt to an extent. To an extent, that is.

Their people had an opposition to fighting alongside the soldiers of Zayin. Fighting shoulder to shoulder with the folks who were planning to invade none too long ago was something Alette herself had opposition to as well.

If an order hadn’t come from the top brass, she would likely have objected.

And in truth, most of the knights did. Why did they have to risk their lives for Beim’s sake?

They did truly have a favor to repay, but many couldn’t understand why they would have to go so far.

Alette, who’d heard the thoughts of the higher-ups wanted to dissent upon hearing the troop dispatch was because of financial debt. But

having Beim wring an immense sum out of them down the line wasn't too fun a tale either.

Moving her reluctant subordinates, and frantically taking on the monster army, Alette took a sidelong glance at Aria.

(Too little experience. As a single soldier leading a small force, she may be proficient, but what about as supreme commander?)

Perhaps Aria was also feeling the brunt of her lack of experience as she gave a vexed expression.

The claws of a Gryphon that landed atop the wall pierced through the chest of one of the soldiers.

"I'll…"

When Aria looked like she was about to rush to his aid, Alette held her back with a hand,.

"A commander doesn't move!"

"But Lyle…"

Lyle could give orders as he performed on the battlefield. But there was no way Aria could do such a thing.

"It's impossible for you. A commander should confidently stand as a commander."

The current Aria could easily win against a Land Dragon, and she had proved her strength to the soldiers. But without the prowess for command, having her moving about would be troublesome. It would be best to keep her still.

"Dispatch a knight. Bind it, and buy time!"

The deceased soldier was one of Lorphys. With loathsome sentiment, Alette continued giving out orders.

Aria hit her fist against a nearby wall…

Within the Jewel.

I tottered in the round table's room as I was beckoned into my room of memories.

The other ancestors weren't there.

I wanted to hear their opinions on the battle, but no one was coming out.

"Um, there's a lot I want to ask."

When I said that, Milleia-san approached me, pushed both her hands against my back, and shoved me into the room.

『Yeah, yeah.』

Without my words going through, I was pushed into my room. And as I rounded the doorway, a warm sunlight and gentle wind brought the smell of vegetation to my nose.

There was a single large tree, and a sheet was spread out under it.

A scene I'd scene somewhere once before.

With my back pushed, I walked up a hill all the way to where the tree cast its shade. Milleia sat on the sheet, and lightly hit her hand against her lap.

『Here.』

"… Yes?"

As I failed to understand, she shrugged her shoulders.

『A lap pillow. Your big sister Milleia is offering you a lap pillow. It's oh so noisy out there, so you'd much like to sleep in a quiet place like this, right?』

Hearing that, I chose to oppose. To be honest, I did feel embarrassed, but more importantly, there was a war going on out there.

Is it really alright that I take it easy down here? That was how I felt.

“Um, I’m…”

As if she read everything off my expression, Milleia-san pulled my hand, and embraced my head. Her chest hit my face, but for some reason it felt gentle. My heart rate didn’t increase.

『Just rest for now. Lyle, if you strain yourself too much, you’ll be all used up. Just let yourself loose to a moderate level. Why is it that Walt men always try to act so tough?』

As she giggled to herself, I accepted her offer to a lap pillow.

The wind felt comfortable, and I felt I was going to remember something. When I closed my eyes, I let myself be taken by that sense of comfort.

『The First tried too hard, and the Second had his troubles. The Third risked his life to protect the territory. The Fourth frantically rose to manage it. The Fifth endured especially so. My brother… the Sixth had his own share of troubles as well. Brod was relied on and stretched to his breaking point… no, that’s wrong. He thought it was necessary, so he let it happen, I’m sure.』

While letting me rest on her lap, she stroked my head. Feeling a somewhat nostalgic sense, I listened to her words.

『… Lyle, you could have tossed it all aside. You didn’t have to push yourself here.』

I spoke quietly.

“But I can’t return anymore. I have to move forwards.”

Maybe Milleia-san noticed my sentiment.

『Is it painful to see the deaths of those fighting for your sake?』

“Many have died because of me. And from here on, well… many more will die.”

The moment I swore to fight Celes, I had resolved myself to protect. But in truth, it was my fault that many humans were now dead.

At times, I didn’t know anymore. But stopping here in my tracks

wasn’t something I could forgive.

Milleia-san simply offered some gentle words.

『But you’ve decided to fight, right?』

“… Yes.”

『Then you have to rest when the time comes to rest.』

And as I felt my mind distancing itself, I heard her voice.

『Lyle, I can’t wait to hear your answer. Will you lift someone up, or make it a stand of your own? We all can’t help but…』

I couldn’t catch the end of it. But I recalled the source of this nostalgic sensation.

(Right. This is the sense of a mother’s warmth… so I had even forgotten something like that.)

In that space with a warm and gentle wind, I drifted asleep.

❼

When I opened my eyes, the room was already ark.

And raising myself, I heard the breath of someone sleeping.

Making a magic light on my left hand, I found Miranda. Miranda who resembled Milleia-san was giving me a lap pillow.

Impacts reached all the way to the room I was in, so I was curious about the situation outside.

Water was prepared nearby, so I took it in hand, poured a cup, and downed it.

Miranda opened her eyes.

“Oh my, good morning.”

She greeted me with a bit of a sleepy expression. Why was she

here? Why was she giving me a lap pillow? There was quite a bit I thought to ask, but I instead passed her a cup of water.

As she accepted it and took a sip, a jolt reached the room once more.

“Seems we’re being pressed quite hard.”

The Skills… Map, Search… using them, I confirmed the surroundings situation. As I thought I had rested a bit too much, Miranda exited the bed, and stretched.

She was wearing little more than a shirt over her undergarments, an inexplicably defenseless appearance.

“Now then, I’m sure it’s harsh for Aria alone, so let’s do our best as well.”

When Miranda said that with a smile, I gave an apology.

“Sorry. Novem’s in the rear. Clara’s on Porter, focusing on transport. Eva had to step back, and May moved to the next preparations, so…”

Shannon was in the back assisting Novem.

In the back lines, the reorganization of troops that stepped back was being carried out. I’m sure they would be dispatched to this wall in the near future. Of course, those stationed at this wall right now would surely be sent back soon as well.

Miranda gave a mischievous smile.

“Well, just leave it to reliable Miranda-san.”

Is what she said.

When I smiled, she smiled as well.

“That’s a big help. Once Eva’s squad returns, I’ll have you step back for a bit. From then on is the real deal.”

There, Miranda came up close to me. She wrapped both hands behind my neck, and brought her face up to mine.

“That aside, your Skill’s effects were cut, so could I leave it to you?”

I averted my eyes a bit, but when I nodded, Miranda smiled. She brought her face closer, making it end up that I was the one being kissed.

From the Jewel, the ancestors that had been watching silently started booing.

In order.

『You’re as passive as ever. Try learning something from mr. lyle.』
『Learn to build the mood up some more, Lyle. How pitiful it is to have to leave it to the other party.』
『… Don’t ever do it in front of the soldiers. Show off that flirting on the battlefield, and it won’t just end with some blood lust.』
『But for a kiss to be required if it’s ever interrupted… There was that talk about how a Skill’s manifestation is based on an individual’s desires, right? Lyle, could it be you were actually aiming for this?』

Just what sort of timing are these guys speaking up in? Kissed in Miranda’s embrace, I suddenly began to feel embarrassed.

As her tongue entered my mouth, Milleia-san chose to call out as well.

『Lyle, wrap your hand around her hip. Hold her tight! Hold her real tight!』

She was all for it.

I was seriously starting to doubt whether she was the same individual I was interacting with before.

17 - Fortress

… Back in Beim, the city was going over its ramparts for defense.

Confirming if there was any damage to them, and making preparations to take down the massive monster army.

But the monsters that had long since begun their march had still yet to reach the free city.

One of the captains leading a mercenary brigade looked out into the distance from the division of wall he had been afforded.

“… Is Fort Redant still holding firm? Well, with twenty thousand, perhaps they’ll last a week.”

He knew of Fort Redant, but however reinforced it may be, he didn’t believe it possible for them to defend against a few hundred thousand monsters.

And that was because he hadn’t heard of Lyle receiving backing from the Trēs House.

The considerable funds he received and used to turn the fort to a fortress was a slice of information out of reach for a single mercenary brigade chief.

But even if he knew it, he wouldn’t have thought they would hold out.

Beim was seriously working under the premise that that allied forces of Zayin and Lorphys were to be annihilated at Fort Redant…

❼

… Beim’s meeting of merchants.

In that meeting where Beim’s top dogs gathered, Fidel was quite irritated.

Meeting hall of multiple levels, the facilitator went on of Beim's impregnable defense.

The main members had already gathered up before the meeting, and confirmed their information with one another. It was precisely because he confirmed it, that Fidel was so irritated.

"As I'm sure you already know, Beim's ramparts are of a special material, boasting a high resistance to magic. At present, we are working to repair any damage they may have, and the mercenaries have already been stationed in perfect condition. The craftsmen are making weapons en masse, and the production of arrows is going on and on."

Sitting in his chair, folding his arms on top of the table, Fidel stared holes into the facilitator brimming with confidence.

(Fool. At this rate, those goods you keep making will become your debt.)

A number of merchants were trying to reap profit from this war.

Purchasing equipment, they were thinking of what would come after the monsters were repeled.

But Fidel knew.

(That gigolo! He went and built up a damn fortress! With my money! He arbitrarily went and used my Trēs House's money to make a fortress, and what's more, he used more than half of it!!?)

There were other facts that made his want to hold his head. Since the Trēs House backed them, a large number of merchants had decided to jump on the bandwagon and back Lyle as well.

That much was fine. But the amount had become something that couldn't be laughed at. Because the enemy's advance had been simply too slow, some of Beim's swift footed adventurers had run off for recon.

And what they found wasn't a fort, but a fortress.

"By the adventurers' diagnosis, even that wouldn't be able to stand

up to it, but… a few of them did say that it would. So the possibility exists.”

The fact the probability of Lyle repelling the monsters at Fort… Fortress Redant wasn’t zero was something Fidel couldn’t forgive.

(Just how stubborn can he be!?)

It vexed him, but what irritated him more was…

(At this rate, it will be a victory for him alone!)

In this matter, Lyle had gone to Beim’s Guild Headquarters requesting some manpower. Naturally, the Guild was reluctant. If it really came down to it, they were prepared to send two to three thousand, but Lyle immediately pulled back.

If it turned out that Lyle really was able to pierce through the monster legion there, then the ‘truth’ would be that the Guild had refused to aid.

(… Hmm, but since the Trēs House did aid him, there are no problems on my side. The Guild will probably try to crush the man for it, but that’s all I could wish for.)

Starting with Fidel, there were plenty of houses that backed them. They did their part, was another way you could phrase it.

They were small-time merchants who didn’t know the surrounding situation, but as many hands were moving under the estimate of the monster attack, a small portion of them had truly thought Lyle could defend against several hundred thousand monsters…

❼

The second wall.

Having used it to buy five days of time, I entered the preparations to retreat.

It was considerably earlier than estimated, but in this situation, it really couldn’t be helped.

Looking down at the monsters from atop the wall, they were crowded together in a not-to-narrow space with cliffs on both sides.

“This is as far as it goes. Almost all of the squad initially stationed here has withdrawn to the fortress. Even changing them out, with repeated withdrawals, our numbers have been cut to a thousand here.”

The second wall itself could still hold.

But we didn’t have the people for it anymore.

By my side was Eva, who’d returned from the Fortress. Her pink blonde hair was a mess, and she was making a bit of a tired expression.

“Lyle, Alette and Creit and even Albano have withdrawn to the back lines. Aria three days ago… we’ve no commanders here.”

I gave a bitter smile.

“Oh well. Since Noy-san returned, I thought we could last a few more days, but I guess not.”

As I said that, she was staring at me intently.

“Our calculations were too soft. Sending them back one after the next, and only sending more as soon as reinforcements come. This isn’t normal.”

It’s true that our calculations were largely off. There, Clara raced up the steps with a message for me.

She had accumulated considerable fatigue as well, and had rested a bit in the back. She had only just woken up, but there were few people who could maneuver Porter, so I had to push her.

“Ah, so here’s where you were, elven fraud.”

“What do you mean fraud!? Can’t you do something about that cynicism of yours? Just listening to you is irritating me, you know?”

Clara made an incredibly wonderful smile.

“I’ve heard people get quite irritated when the arrow hits the mark. Now then, a message for you, Lyle-san.”

Seeing Clara’s face turn serious, I grabbed and held down Eva’s arm that seemed to want to grasp at her at any moment.

“The preparations are complete. The smiths have also finished up the ‘Exploding Arrows’ from Arumsaas. When I told them they were invented to make pocket change for students, they got angry and said it was too dangerous. And Boosted Arrows… they’ve given them an official name.”

I nodded, and addressed her.

“Carry back the injured and sleep-deprived. We’ve things to prepare here as well.”

Clara lightly pushed up her glasses with her fingertips.

“A round trip again? Will you be returning first?”

I shook my head.

“My apologies, I’m going back last. Hurry.”

When Clara went back down the stairs, I let go of Eva’s arm, and spoke.

“Eva, prepare to withdraw. And send Monica and the Valkyries back too.”

Eva looked in Clara’s direction.

“That toxic wench… yeah, that’s fine, but it’s already night. With so few people, I think they’ll easily get to this point, you know? You sure you want to send off Monica and co.? They’ll hate it too.”

When she’s supposed to be an automaton, why is her self-assertion so strong?

“No problem. In the worst case, this place need only remain in shape.”

Because the second wall… really carried a separate purpose.

❼

Night.

It was about to become morning soon.

As Clara was carrying personnel off to the fortress, I looked at the army of monsters.

“I don’ get the feeling their numbers are going down at all.”

I was alone there, so I could reply to the voices of the Jewel. The Third sounded as aloof as ever.

『Why of course. No matter how you chip them down, the enemy’s some hundred thousand… even if you take out half, it’s a massive legion that surpasses ten thousand. This is a bit earlier than planned, but you could call it favorable.』

I looked up at the night sky.

“… We let most of the flying monsters slip by.”

While I was resting, or had my attention taken by something else, the flying monsters let other monsters mount their backs, and even crossed over the fortress in the back.

The Fifth sounded a little angry at me.

『Don’t think you can do everything. The other folks are doing everything they can. And you did what you could. Then when it passes that, it’s Beim’s responsibility. Like hell you’d be able to not let a single one get through. Though it may be a different story if you had a greater number.』

With the magic that came flying, the top of the wall was in a bad state.

Eva came over to me, and informed me her preparations were finished.

“Lyle, you’re the last.”

“Got it.”

Descending the wall, I saw the large-scale Porter preparing to depart. The Porter Damien had made for transporting cardo was stuffed with knights and soldiers and elves.

I climbed onto the roof, and told Clara to depart.

“Let’s get going.”

“… Yes.”

She looked somewhat embarrassed for some reason, but now wasn’t the time to call out to her on that.

In regards to the wall that no longer had any resistance, the monsters launched their attacks all at once. Feelign the resultant tremor through porter, I turned to the wall.

Perhaps the monsters thought the gate weaker than the structure, as they started concentrating their attacks there.

When Porter was around halfway between the second wall and the fortress, the gate was breached. Monsters began flowing through it.

Preparing the silver bow in my left hand, I took a stance on the roof.

“I’ll take down the ones quick on their feet. Clara, just keep straight for the fortress.”

“U-understood.”

The large porter had a space in the front for humans to ride. By getting in it, Clara was able to look ahead as she controlled Porter, with increased safety.

Getting my breathing in order, I fired an arrow at the Kentaurus running at the front.

The head one fell, and those behind got their legs caught up, and fell as well. But trampling over their fallen comrades, the monsters marched on.

With the next arrows, I could defeat monsters in much the same

way, but paying no heed, the monsters continued to tread over them and press on. It didn't have much of a stalling effect.

Using the Skill… Speed… I was accelerating Porter, but even so, it looked like we were just barely going to reach the fortress.

The fortress' gate was open, and we need only get through it.

I fired one arrow after the next, but it just looked as if the bolts were being swallowed up by the army of monsters.

The Fourth let his voice.

『It looks as if it's having not the slightest effect.』

There, the Seventh as well.

『I'm sure it's doing something, more than less. Better than doing nothing, I'm sure.』

As he spoke, a large number of monsters were trampled, and brushing them away with a hand, a large monster leapt out.

White fur, it was a monkey-like monster with a red face. Its long forelimbs boasted sharp claws, and revealing its fangs, it used its long limbs to rush at us.

Size-wise, perhaps five to six meters.

Anyways, it came at us as if it were shot out of the monster army.

Pulling the silver bow, I shot an arrow, but the monster reacted immediately, moved its body just a little to the side, and while the arrow gave chase, it didn't pierce into the point I had aimed at.

It pierced into its shoulder and exploded, but it didn't seem to give too much damage. I'm sure its thick white fur blocked it.

Turning to look at the fortress, it was already before our eyes. I shot two arrows to try slowing the monkey down, but the enemy ignored them, and barreled on.

I returned the silver bow to Jewel form, and hung it back around my neck.

Milleia-san sounded a little surprised.

『Oh, you're not using the sword?』

I pulled the katana at my waist, and took a stance with it in both hands.

"No, I do want to use it. But I wanted to try and test how this one feels…"

At that moment, the large-scale Porter rounded the gateway, and a large and sturdy-looking gate began falling from above.

But the monster took a leap, and ended up infiltrating the fortress walls. The large-scale Porter took a large brake to kill its momentum, the back part of its long and slender body still moving forward, causing it to take a ninety degree turn before it stopped.

I jumped off the roof, and confronted the oversized monster.

Getting out of Porter, Clara yelled my way.

"Lyle-san, it's a Giant Kong! It was probably a boss monster in the Labyrinth!"

As I tread over the ground, the red face of the Giant Kong glared at me.

It seems it had chosen me as its first prey.

It greatly expanded its chest, and raised a war cry, as I started off towards it, drawing my gun from the holster on the back of my hip.

I took a leap and pointed the gunpoint at the large, open mouth of the Giant Kong.

"If the skin doesn't work, how about the mouth?"

When I pulled the trigger, a bullet shot into its mouth. Perhaps it hurt, as the Giant Kong let out a strange voice.

But its fishy breath built up some wind power, blowing me away a bit.

In the air, I aimed at the glaring monkey's eyes, and pulled the trigger.

That was the gun's sixth cartridge, so after landing, I returned it to its holster. The Giant Kong closed its left eye, as blood flowed down from it. Blood also fell down the corners of its mouth, and the red face looking at me with its deep wrinkles became even more wrinkled.

As I took a stance with the Katana in both hands, the surrounding knights and soldiers began to gather. In their hands were guns and bows, and crossbows as well.

"Leave this one to me!"

Saying that, I stepped in, and used the Skill… Up n' Down… to dull my enemy's movements while enhancing my own. The Giant Kong tried to shake off the Skill's restraints, but as I approached, it gave up and swung its left arm around.

I moved to its blind left side. It was recklessly swinging that left arm about, so I went ahead, and took a horizontal swipe with the Katana.

Even though the blade seemed to be made of rare metal, it chipped.

But the Giant Kong's left arm flew off, and collided with the fortress' wall.

"It cuts alright."

I looked at the Katana, and gave such an impression, but it still chipped when smelted of valuable rare metal. Its edge was made too sharp, and too fragile. If I learned how to use it, perhaps it would be different, but in my case, it would be ruined before I knew it.

However, the enemy was one that boasted a robust coat of fur. If it could lop off an arm of a foe like that, perhaps it would work out.

Blood scattered about, as the Giant Kong hit its right fist against me. I rolled along the ground to avoid it, while cutting at its legs.

As its movements gradually became worse, I jumped up, and drew a single line across its neck.

The fur that could stand an explosion was cut through, and its head danced in the air as I wiped off the blood sticking to the Katana.

The sky was turning red, and I looked at the blade.

“It’s at least better than a mass produced sabre, but…”

I muttered that as I looked at the chipped edge, and the cracks running along its breadth. Valkyrie Unit One came over to my side.

“Master, a replacement Katana.”

From the wing-like binder on her back, she took out a spare Katana as she said that.

Monica came running with a similar replacement, but she stared at us with a dumbfounded expression.

“F-for this Monica to be late…”

She looked considerably depressed.

Letting out a sigh, I replaced the Katana at my hip before issuing orders around. And I headed off towards the stairs to the top of the fortress.

“Strip off the monster’s materials. This one will be worth some. Who’s up top?”

Clara looked at the Giant Kong and explained the dissection steps to the soldiers before turning back to me.

“Aria-san, and Miranda-san. Alette-san should be in the dungeons… Novem-san is busy with treating the injured soldiers.”

Hearing that, I called out to Eva, and started my way up.

Eva addressed the elves.

“How about it! Achievements worthy of song, are they not!?”

… She bragged.

“Certainly. But when we’re this busy, I’ve no time to think up tunes.”
“I want to hear the tales of the other ones that stood out.”

“If it’s to be made to song, then that battle just now should… no, in that case, it would end up too long.”

To speak of this battle, and turn it to song, the elves were conversing amongst themselves with serious expressions.

A little taken aback, I headed for the top alone.

Climbing the stairs, I stood atop the high point of the fortress.

The Third, seeing the scene around…

『Now then, it’s a big job from here on. We’ve done all the preparations, so we must properly get out the results.』

… He said.

Cannon barrels were sticking out from the fortress’ insides. The soldiers had prepared mountains of arrows, as they held up their bows and crossbows.

The knights and magicians were awaiting my orders, and an army of around ten thousand were gathered here.

The Fourth sounded like he was having fun.

『The rate of Growth breaking out was exceedingly fast, so we’ve retreated back to the fortress much faster than anticipated. But that’s all there is to it. We’ll strike them down here.』

The Fifth looked at the second wall in the distance.

『They’ve faithfully passed through the gate like good Samaritans. So as long as we hold them at our gate, they’re sealed in. Let’s go about it without letting a single land monster through. Well, I doubt they’ll get far, but not having any spills is a good thing.』

The second wall was equipped with two doors. And while the first had been broken down, the second could be closed up at any time.

The Seventh spoke in a serious tone.

『From here on is just plain work. Just crush the monsters you’ve sealed in. You have enough preparations to take care of that…

Lyle!』

I gripped the Jewel, and looked up at the sky. Trying to infiltrate the fortress, Gryphons and Hippogryphs flew in with other creatures atop their backs.

“So they still had some aerial forces on them? But they should’ve used them sooner.”

Higher still than those monsters, quilins racing through the sky let lightning fall from their prided horns, shooting down the flying monsters.

It wasn’t just a few of them.

Their numbers surpassing a dozen, the quilins looked down over the monsters.

And in the distance, I could see May. She headed to the second wall, and moved the contraption to close the gate.

Its closing meant the monsters trapped here no longer had anywhere to run.

Having experienced growth, and lost some time, the knights and soldiers could likely display even more power than before.

Milleia-san spoke.

『So even an army of monsters is mere food to raise up your elite soldiers? Good grief, you Walt House heads sure are scary.』

I had no objection.

Stronger than the second wall, the fortress had firm magic countermeasures in place. After that, we just had to wipe out the monsters sealed here.

As I stood on the highest point of the fortress, the gazes of knights and soldiers gathered on me.

Atop the fortress, a flag swayed in the wind, glittering in the rising morning sun.

I held up my right hand.

“From here one, we shall get serious! Use all your strength to… wipe out the enemy!”

Before the sealed monsters, the troops wrung out their voices. Their protruded their fists to the heavens as their morale rose.

(… Right. From here on is the real deal, and from here on, it will be hell.)

I thought, as I watched the army of monsters approaching before my eyes.

18 - Brother Maksim

Before the monster army that did nothing but try to press on, I raised my right hand high.

Lowering it down to eye level, I raised my voice.

The fortress was unlike the first or second wall, boasting a splendid construction worthy of its fortress title. I doubt it would break so easily.

The knights and soldiers in the sturdy fortress maybe a bit lacking in judgement, looked a bit relieved within its walls.

“First through third squadrons, fire!”

Our forces were divided in four, and three of them shot their magic towards the large-scale army of monsters. Fire, wind, and earth came down on them, and to block it, the monsters deployed their Magic Shield as well.

A semi-transparent yellow light rose to try and defend, but breaking through them, the magic came raining down.

The opposite of our initial position.

“Is the oil ready?”

When I said that, the answer came from the one commanding the modified siege weapon inside the fortress, Clara.

『All clear. We can fire anytime.』

“Then scatter it flashily.”

Hearing my voice, barrels of oil came flying out of the fortress one after the next. They passed over we who were at the fortress’ highest point, and began raining down on the monsters.

After a sufficient number of barrels were fired, I…

“Fourth squadron, use fire attribute.”

A moment later, fire attribute magic was fired. A majority of it was blocked, but as long as a single portion of it was set alight, it wouldn’t be a problem.

The scattered barrels burst, and splattered their surroundings in oil. Once ignited, they began to blaze up.

I watched the scene.

“Miranda, Eva.”

Calling out to the two of them, I had the magician and knight casters step back, replacing them with elves and soldiers with guns.

From the fortress walls, Boosted Arrows and guns were fired. The sounds of explosions and gunshots rung out as they continued coming down on the blazing monsters.

And trampling over the monsters that had been rendered immobile, the next wave of monsters advanced.

“… Prepare the cannons.”

On my words, the cannons breathed flames in succession.

And in that space of time, the catapults and magics were prepared once more.

❼

… In the fortress’ interior, Shannon was helping out.

She was carrying out miscellaneous tasks by Novem’s side, but there were crowds of injured troops around.

While many knights and soldiers experienced ‘Growth’, and had to withdraw, it wasn’t as if there wasn’t anyone being injured. In pain, some had even lost an arm or a leg.

“Goddammit, why was I…”

“My eyes… someone turn on the lights…”
“Mother… mother…”

If there was to be another battlefield in this war, then surely she was standing on it. Or so Shannon thought as she followed behind Novem.

Approaching the injured newly brought in, Novem immediately started treatment through magic. There were other magicians capable of healing magic as well, but with so many being brought in one after the next, the countermeasures couldn’t catch up.

Among them…

“Of course not. You’re injured!”

One of the other magicians was trying to stop a patient.

“Shut it! I’m gonna avenge my men! I’m gonna kill every last one of those monster bastards out there!”

A knight with his body wrapped in bandages took his weapon in hand, and tried to go out.

As Shannon watched in the corner of her eye, Novem spoke as she treated another patient.

“Shannon-chan, bandages.”

“Eh? Ah, yes.”

After she handed a bandage over, Novem disinfected the wound, and wrapped it. If she handled each and every wound with magic, Novem would collapse.

Once she had nimbly finished first aid, the collapsed soldier…

“T-thank you.”

… Spoke.

Novem smiled.

“Don’t mind it. You’ll be right as rain in no time.”

Saying that, she stood, and headed off to the next patient being carried in.

There were some who gave thanks. Upon hearing she was one of Lyle's comrades, there were some who rained her with insults.

In such a place, Novem continued carrying out treatment.

To Shannon, it looked as if Novem was accepting all the negative emotions as Lyle built up his fame.

His other comrades were all carrying out their varied roles. Within all that, Shannon thought.

(Just what should I… what do I even want to do?)

She thought…

❼

… In a room of the fortress, Adele was calculating on a table.

Food and materials, with personnel placement, there were many things that had to be done.

Damien was also in the room, and his maids were looking after him. While they were at it, they attended to Adele as well. Right, stressing the, 'while they were at it' part.

They were still a help, so she had no complaints, but Adele…

"Arrows, bullets… it all flows away like water down the stream. It's strange. This is strange… our money… our gold is running far, far away."

Moving men wasn't free. Calculating it all, an outrageous amount of money was circulating around.

This was different from the sort of war Adele knew of. It was so different her eyes were getting teary.

Seeing her like that, Damien spoke.

“Isn’t it fine? It was someone else’s money to begin with.”

There, Adele hit her hands against the table, and used the recoil to stand.

“What will that thought process ever accomplish!? From here on, no matter how much money we get, it won’t be enough! Have you not forgotten your own research funds were someone else’s money!?”

Damien took a sip of the tea in his cup.

“Well, well, just go ask Lyle, and he’ll seduce another rich lass for you. I’ve begun to realize it lately, you know. If Lyle sweet talks the daughters of Beim’s rich guys, then he could even move the city of Beim to his will.”

Hearing Damien’s story, Adele’s face cramped up.

“There’s no way he could do that. And wait, even if he could, that would make Lyle-san no different from Celes, would it not?”

Damien pouted.

“You think so? Lyle’s got a strange sense of integrity, so I do think he’ll properly take responsibility. See, no one will be unhappy here.”

Seeing him let out a dry laugh, Adele pressed a hand to her face.

“… The misfortune falls on those concerned with those rich lasses of yours. In truth, it does seem the Trēs House’s head is considerably angry right now.”

Letting out a sigh, Adele turned her interest to the state of the battlefield.

Her guard Maksim was also out on the field. And so she prayed he wouldn’t get injured…

❼

… On top of the fortress walls, Maksim took on the monsters climbing up.

Wearing a metal protector over his forehead, he held up his spear and dispatched monster after monster on the fortress ground.

The more he defeated, the more monster corpses piled up below, allowing more species of monsters to try climbing up.

“Step back!!”

While he swung about his spear in a grand fashion, his attacks never touched an ally.

He impaled a monster that climbed up, and flung him off outside the wall.

The knights who carried the same role as him watched his fighting style in shock.

“He’s strong.”

“Who is he? A famed knight?”

Hearing those voices, Maksim recalled those that had been his friends and rivals in Bahnseim.

(I guess there’s no way my name would be known in foreign lands. Just goes to show how vast the world is…)

His thoughts turning to his comrades defeated by Celes, Maksim swung his spear. At that moment, a Hippogryph started down in a nosedive.

Maksim turned his left hand to the monster.

“【Sand Arm】”

He used a magic. It was no ordinary magic, but a magic he used so often it had cemented itself as his Skill.

An arm fashioned of hardened sand, boasting an appearance as if it were clad in armor. Its giant hand grasped the flying Hippogryph, and crushed it to death.

A former knight adept in magic and spears… Maksim Danhel… back in Bahnseim, he was even named among the greatest of knights.

“Sorry, but for milady’s sake, I can’t be losing. From here on, not a single one shall pass!”

Within a state of constant monster attack, Lyle’s forces were somehow holding out…

❼

In the highest, and most conspicuous point of the fortress, I took command.

I transmitted between comrades connected with Connection, and watched the state of the whole as I gave out orders.

Which would need what number of men.

Which squad to withdraw, and what timing to send reinforcements with.

I *was* giving out those sorts of orders, but for some reason, I felt I was just acting as a relay station. I processed all the information flooding in, and put out orders based on them.

Perhaps because I was in such a conspicuous point, monsters wouldn’t stop targeting me. But I didn’t have to raise a hand. The reason being…

“You’re in the way!”

The monsters that made it to me were hit out of the walls with Monica’s hammer.

The monsters hit with that giant hammer fell apart in midair, and rained down in quite a horrible state.

And around us, the Valkyries were also on standby. From the binders on their backs, they took out guns, and attacked the approaching monsters.

Their precise marksmanship was one thing, but even if the monsters came close, they could easily deal with them.

(The problem is the Mana. These guys consume it like crazy.)

My Mana pool had increased, but with Skills, four automatons, and a Jewel… with all of them draining it from me, containing Mana consumption was a crucial task.

(If I have to mobilize more units, I'll be rendered immobile.)

Short term may be fine, but I concluded that moving a number of Valkyries over a long term would be impossible.

While I thought over it, Monica waved her hand at me.

"Did you see, Chicken Dickwad!? The valor of Monica! Mighty in combat, almighty in housework! I'm on a different level than those degraded scraps littered around!"

As Monica delightfully waved her hands, the Valkyries expressionlessly pointed their gunpoints at her. I felt they would pull the trigger without the slightest hesitation.

"Take this seriously! Monica, don't rile them up!"

Valkyrie Unit One blatantly clicked her tongue.

"Che, looks like master's saved you, scrap metal."

There, Monica held up her giant hammer.

"Unfortunate accidents are an everyday occurance on the battlefield. I'll scrap you, and use that scrapping as vital data for future experiments!"

I addressed Clara.

"… Clara, how are things on your side?"

As we were bound by Connection, she could see my situation as well.

『… Next preparations are in place. Gunpowder was fine, right?』

As she said that, Aria butted in. Aria was inside the fortress, managing the cannons.

『Ready over here too. But it looks like we won't be able to fire for a while after this one. Something about washing the barrels or something.』

(Cleaning out the cannons? Then we'll have to scatter some magic for a while.)

I addressed everyone.

『You heard her. Next we'll be using a consecutive stream of small-scale magic.』

There, from Miranda.

『It's a bit rough here. The main knights fell back. Can we send out Alette-san yet?』

On those words, I made a conflicted expression.

"… Shannon, go check on her."

The conversation suddenly turning to her, Shannon sounded reluctant.

『Eck, me?』

There, Novem spoke to her.

『Please go, Shannon-chan. And you can have a bit of a break afterwards.』

Reluctant as she was, Shannon went off to confirm Alette-san's condition.

❼

… Shannon arrived at a special space within the fortress.

It was prepared as a dungeon, but it wasn't like there were any criminals to imprison there.

The dubious post-Growth troops were locked up there.

As Shannon set foot in…

“If I’m not there, everyone will… I’m begging you! Let me out of here!”
“The time hath finally arrived to remove the seal on this left arm of mine. I don’t want anymore to die…”
“… Perhaps I’m done for already. Perhaps I’m no good. Taking it out on Albano… just how petty a man am I?”

The last one, cradling his knees as he looked at the wall, was Creit. It seems that to contrast his usual high tensions, his post-Growth left him depressed.

She couldn’t watch.

For a different reason than the injured patients, Shannon couldn’t bring herself to watch.

And heading to her destination cell, she found Alette tied up, rolling on the floor.

It was the knights of Lorphys. Meaning Alette’s subordinates who did it. Saying they couldn’t let their captain show off such a horrid state, they spun rope upon rope around her, and shoved her in a cell.

Alette was left showing her back to Shannon.

“Are you alright? Can you come out yet?

When she asked, Alette shifted her weight, and rolled to face Shannon.

“I’m fine. I properly have my marriage registration form with me. My preparations for a romance breaking out on the battlefield are perfect!”

Shannon made a fed-up expression.

“Hey, do you carry that around with you regularly?”

Alette made an exceedingly nice smile.

“Of course.”

Or so she said. Shannon thought perhaps it was hopeless.

“Didn’t you say you didn’t have it last time?”

“Hmm, ’twas my embarrassment. I’ve never let it leave my hands, and I’ve made it easily accessible so as not to let the chance slip by. I even have spares.”

Shannon let out a sigh, before signaling to Lyle.

『It’s no good.』

Sending the message, she began her way out of the room lined with cells.

“W-wait! Come to think of it, there was that headbanded, muscular, beautiful knight, right!? Could you tell me his name!? I’ve fallen for his skill with the spear. I want him to pierce me too!”

Shannon turned back to Alette.

“You mean Maksim-niisan? But he’s already got someone he likes, you know? Quite wholeheartedly. Though I have to say it’ll be quite harsh given their ages.”

There, Alette rolled her way back against the wall.

“Then nay.”

She seemed quite depressed. At that moment, Miranda sent a voice to Shannon through Connection.

『What are you doing Shannon!? Here’s where you give her a glimmer of hope! You can make use of that hope in however many ways you want to later. Even so, she’s still out of it… people with a big Growth gap are so…』

Shannon thought…

(Even as her sister, how horrible, I say. And wait, Maksim-niisan’s a good person, so if possible, I’d like him to get with Adele-san.)

19 - A Mountain of Corpses

The piling remains of monsters reached more than halfway up the fortress walls.

When you defeated some, they'd be tread over, and with the next monsters defeated as well, they'd simply keep stacking up.

But I couldn't see the figure of any monsters that would pose a threat to us.

The merciless attacks from the fortress, coupled with the quilins' attacks from the sky. Sealed in without a place to run, the monsters only waited for their defeat.

As that raged on, the Fifth let his voice from the Jewel.

『This lack of resistance is strange. For that Giant Kong to be the only Boss-Class monster… it's surely not enough.』

The present state that could practically be called a harvest at this point felt quite insufficient.

(Personally, I don't want to fight anymore here. If I experienced a Growth at this point, it would be a massive problem.)

It would become impossible for me to continue battle, and I'd be bedridden from a few days to a week.

As I couldn't stay away for such a long period, since coming to the fortress, I had abstained from fighting as much as possible.

It was a massive legion of monsters… but the majority of them could be called weak.

The representative monster example- Goblins- were present, but there were also a lot of insectoid monsters.

After taking down their stronger ones, it really was just sealing them in, and beating them down.

Numbers could be a large power.

But at this point, we were winning, even in numbers.

And after defeating too many, a problem came out.

『Lyle, Boosted Arrows are pointless. Using normal arrows is more efficient.』

From Aria as well.

『Using cannon shells would be wasteful when they're so dispersed.』

Clara was the same.

『We can still prepare rounds on our side, but any more would be useless in my opinion.』

They were sharing visual information with me, so the scenery I saw from atop the fortress was visible to everyone through Connection's line. Seeing that, Clara also concluded than any more catapult use would hold no meaning.

From the Jewel, the Seventh let his voice.

『… Lyle, it's time to finish up. Blow away the front of the gate.』

I gripped the Jewel, and issued orders to Miranda.

"Miranda, clean out the front of the gate. Our forces will make our debut."

『Understood. So what about us?』

Should our party go out as well? When she asked something like that, I gave a 'no', and refused.

"… It'll be rough even after it's over. For now, just rest. Everyone."

I wanted everyone to rest. Just look at the scale of the battlefield. There was the problem of cleaning up.

The Fourth let his high spirits show.

『Now then, from here on's my turn. To turn the collected Magic

Stones and materials into negotiation tools, we must press on efficiently. Lyle, send Monica-chan and Clara-chan around to support Adele-chan.』

Paperwork awaited. The battle itself was nearing its end, but we would still be busy. And we were going to collect the drops we could.

Besides that, there were plenty of things that had to be done. Transporting the injured, as well as rites for the deceased. Those killed in action didn't come out as a small number.

"… Leave the assault's command to Alette. I'm sure she'll rampage around enough to serve a diversion."

There, Aria and Eva…

『… Isn't it bad if we don't send anyone ourselves?』

『Right, right! We've got to send one or two! Yep! I volunteer!』

『I-I'm also going out!』

Aria and Eva announced their candidacy, and I could guess the general reason. It was going to get busy, and it seems they had picked up that it was to be their dreaded paperwork.

There, Miranda spoke.

『That's fine. But once you return, you're definitely helping us out as well.』

Her words shut them up.

I could somewhat picture the two of them looking down. Smiling a bit, I looked down at the final monsters putting up resistance before the fortress.

"… It's the end."

…In Beim's Guild Headquarters, it was a few days before the information on Fort Redant reached.

In the Guild's meeting of executives, the members looked through the facts of how a fort had been upgraded to a fortress, and of how an allied force of Zayin and Lorphys, led by Lyle, was able to take down a force ten times their size.

Participating alongside her superior, Tanya was surprised on the news as well.

"What should we do!? Our adventurers haven't been challenging our Labyrinth lately! We've insufficient Magic Stones and materials!"

"… We can just buy them off the two countries that attained victory. No, that was on Beim's territory. Just say the stones and materials they obtained fall under our jurisdiction, and…"

"And you think that'll pass? Do it, and we will lose our credibility."

The contents of the meeting pertained to Lyle and co.'s victory. Going as far as to completely neglect the casualties suffered by the adventurers of Beim.

"Even when we've casualties of our own."

When Tanya said that, her superior looked at the documents.

"From the East Branch, some adventurers of high evaluations. They were unlucky. For them to be in the sole point that casualties came out in."

Adventurers of the East Branch had been dispatched to defend important points. But attacked by the monster that flew over Fortress Redant, they had been thrown into battle.

They were unlucky.

If it were a Gryphon, they'd be able to handle it. But a black, large, crow-like monster… a Raven…

Attacked by such a monster, the party suffered heavy casualties. Luckily enough, another party took care of it, but even so, the death

toll wasn't small.

Her superior watched the flow of the meeting.

"Well, well, well, even so, Beim is in a bit of a grave state. A large load of weapons left over. With Magic Stones and materials, we haven't been challenging the Labyrinth for a while, so how shall we compensate… Looking at the whole, it's only a slight number, thought."

Numerically, it wouldn't sting. But it wasn't a number that could be ignored.

And at present, with plans falling through, a large amount of equipment remained.

Tanya's superior looked at the numbers on the page.

"This could be that… send the equipment to Zayin and Lorphys in exchange for the stones and such. It'll likely go like that. But what shall the merchants say then?"

Complaining his head was hurting, the superior seemed to be thinking over future countermeasures.

And Tanya affirmed once more that to the top brass, adventurers were nothing more than numbers on a page…

❼

… Beim's Eastern Guild Branch.

Rühe the receptionist didn't know what sort of face she should make.

"… Eh?"

The lone adventurer that returned was heavily injured. His arm was wrapped in bandaging. It was more than clear that he had suffered a loss. It was no longer possible for him to serve as an adventurer.

But more than that…

“… It’s their Guild Cards. I came to return them. And this was his.”

A beautiful ornament. At a glance, one could tell how expensive it was.

The adventurer was a comrade of the one Rühe had been close to.

“For those that didn’t write wills to leave their belongings to their bereaved families, as a party member, I’m the one who’s supposed to carry them on. But I thought this alone should be passed on to you.”

As she accepted it, she didn’t feel a sense of reality. She unsteadily moved to search out the Guild Card copies kept by the Guild.

Guild Cards existed in pairs, and when an adventurer passed, a cut would be made in their name. That was how the Guild could confirm their deaths.

As Rühe searched through the Guild Card storage, what she found was a card with a gash through it.

The name of the adventurer she was close to was scratched out. His death was certain.

“… Eh? But… I mean… he said there was something he wanted to tell me when he got back.”

Sitting down on the spot, Rühe let her tears fall messily over the floor…

❼

In the fortress were lined body-filled body bags.

Comrades were confirming the remains, and recording them. For us to reimburse the bereaved on a later date.

In such a place, I stood stock still.

Most of the body bags, for others to confirm the faces, had their heads out. Among them were some left in terrible states. The

subordinates and superiors of these men had died in battle.

Some collapsed in tears.

One of the soldiers spread the drink in his hand over a body.

“Look, I bought this tall treat for you lot to drink. Tasty, ain’t it… if you like it, then tell me, dammit!”

As he cried, the thirty-year-old man poured wine over the body of the soldier in his teens. Around, some extended their hands to stop the man, but they had stopped themselves along the way.

At a different point, those from the same village gathered.

There, a youth in his teens was being comforted by those around him.

“Your father was a great man. A great one he was.”

“Y-yeah!”

Zayin, and Lorphys… we had dragged in those uninvolved parties. There was the reason of paying back debt, but that was a story for the countries’ higher-ups. It was, quite likely, a tale these men would never feel a part of.

There, I heard Milleia-san’s voice.

『Lyle, drop by the Jewel for a bit.』

❼

There were many sacrifices. Deaths surpassed a thousand, while injuries, crossed well over three thousand.

Yet within all that, I returned to my room, and transferred my mind to the Jewel.

In the round table room, the ancestors… their numbers had dwindled considerably, making me feel a bit of loneliness.

The Third stood from his seat, and turned to me.

『Lyle, I think now's the best time to ask. Have you decided what you want to do here on? Defeating Celes is a given. Beyond that… Lyle, what you want to do. I'll just throw this out there, but say you'll take responsibility and kill yourself, and I won't forgive you.』

As always, he had a somewhat soft tone and expression. But from his last words, I could feel something akin to a threat.

"… I've no intentions of dying."

The fourth nodded after hearing that.

The Fifth spoke in regards to me.

『Then what will you do? Help someone make a stand? Or take a stand for yourself?』

Two options. But at present, my only option was the later.

"Aren't you being a bit sneaky here? If you look at the practical problem, we don't have an individual who could be the flag to hoist in defeating Celes. Zayin's Holy Maiden is too weak a position. Lorphys' princess is out of the question. And there isn't such an individual in Beim, is there?"

The Seventh nodded. He nodded, but spoke to me in a slightly cold tone.

『I've said it before. And it's already time for you to look ahead, and take action. Lyle, what did you think upon seeing so many corpses? What did you feel seeing those injured in battle? Did you want to run? At the very point you failed to find someone more suitable to the task than yourself, it was your fault.』

It's true I had the time. But I couldn't find a person to be the flag to fight Celes… to fight Bahnseim.

The Fourth spoke kindly.

『If there was one more suited than you, we would've told you to support them. But if you couldn't find one, then isn't that just what it means?』

I nodded only once, and clenched my fist. What went through my mind was the scenes of patients Novem saw, and the lines of bodies.

It was all my responsibility.

If I had stayed quiet, I'm sure I'd have fought in Beim, and I'd never have to feel like this. I could have made it someone else's fault.

I raised my face, and sent a look around the five. And I spoke.

"… I'll aim for the summit. Perhaps being king would be a difficult thing, but even so, what I set my sights on is the top."

That I would make a stand, that I would be the one standing at the front. When I said that, the Third smiled. He didn't joke around as he usually did.

『… I see. You've decided that of your own will, have you?』

"Yes. I've decided it."

Finally, Milleia-san stood, turned to me with a serious expression, and opened her mouth. She touched her right hand to her chest, and…

『Lyle, surely both you and Celes shall kill many. Even if you manage to keep casualties to a minimum, it's certain you'll build up a mountain of corpses. Many enemies will die. And many of those that have chosen to follow you shall perish as well. So you must stand atop that mountain of friend and foe. Don't forget the point you're aiming for is one made of death upon death.』

As I nodded, Milleia-san smiled.

『Lyle, the place you're aiming for is a point none of your ancestors have ever reached.』

I laughed, before turning to everyone.

"I'm doing it because I have to. It's not like I'm fighting because I like to. If I don't, the continent will be stormy… if I ended it as beating down Bahnseim, then I'm sure the surrounding nations will chip away

at its weakened state. In that case, an era of war will descend upon us.”

It’s not like simply defeating her was the end. Thinking of what was to come later, someone had to get them all together. Seeking aid from surrounding nations, and not handing them anything in return, wouldn’t leave anyone satisfied.

But letting Bahnseim be cut up to everyone’s wills wasn’t something I could overlook.

And once Bahnseim was shaved away and gone, new countries would have new borders. In the worst case, they’d clash over territory disputes, and war would only continue.

It would take a few decades for them to calm down. No, perhaps they could dispute for centuries.

“Right. Since we’re at it, how about we go and build up an empire?”

When I said that, the Third laughed.

『Oh, nice.』

The Fourth pushed up his glasses with his fingertips.

『It’s not bad as an option. Even if you get Zayin and Lorphys together, melting them down will have some resistance come out. But you can’t just abandon them either.』

The Fifth didn’t sound interested. But he seemed to refute my decision a bit.

『Why do you do such troublesome things? Lyle, you’ve got a personality prone to loss, I tell you.』

The Seventh looked delighted.

『I see, my grandson an emperor… not bad at all. So the time has finally come for the Walt House’s continental domination.』

I looked up at the ceiling. At that moment, Milleia-san called over to me.

『Lyle, that decision is no joke, right?』

I turned my face towards her, and nodded. I told her my feelings were real.

“I can’t really leave this job to someone else. And I definitely can’t leave it to someone who’d do it because they’d like to. Continental domination may be going too far, but even so, I’ll get Bahnseim, and its neighbors in order. I mean, I’m a man of the Walt House after all. And I’m right in the mood for some exploits that don’t fall short of my ancestors.”

When I joked around, Milleia-san laughed to herself. But she looked a little sorrowful as well.

『That path is a grim one. You’ve already lost the road home, but are you sure?』

“I mind it not.”

『I see. Then we’ve got to support you with all we’ve got.』

20 - Postwar Process

Outside the fortress, we cast large quantities of monsters into a large hole, and burned them.

We stripped off all usable materials, and recovered magic stones. But for those that suffered heavy damage, we had to ignore the materials, and collect only the stones.

The knights and magicians poured oil in the hole, and set it alight.

While the smoke rose to the sky, I wore a mask to inspect the process as I spoke with Alette-san.

As we walked side by side, there were some soldiers who greeted me as we passed. Among them, soldiers who blatantly clicked their tongues at me…

The dissatisfaction of the knights and soldiers of Lorphys was considerable, it seems.

Alette-san apologized.

“Sorry. Quite a few of them understand it in their heads, but their feelings don’t agree.”

I lightly shook my head to the side.

“I don’t mind. I’ve done enough to deserve it, after all. Now then, continuing out talk… Division of the stones and materials, was it? We’ll take the Giant Kong, but everything else can be split with you and Zayin, fifty-fifty. Is that alright?”

There, Alette-san looked at me, her face warping a little.

“*We*’re fine with that, but in that case, *you*’ll lose out on your share. Our side was estimating thirty to forty percent, just to let you know.”

Both Zayin and Lorphys likely wanted the Magic Stones and Materials enough to sprout hands from their throats. Because they wouldn’t have to buy them off from Beim.

“Yeah, I’ll accept a few on my side. The Giant Kong’s Magic Stone was of considerable quality, it seems, and with the materials in my hands as well, I’ve earned more than planned, so there isn’t a problem.”

It was true, but that wasn’t all. In truth, my wallet was stuffed with merchant backing, starting with the Trēs House. Even after putting out condolence money, I would have some left over.

On top of that, Zayin and Lorphys would require large amounts of stones and materials soon.

“Well, I’ve already discussed it with Lonbolt-san and Gastone-san, so don’t worry about it. Just split it in half, and head home. Oh, and please don’t dispute about it.”

When I joked around, Alette-san let out a sigh.

“You think we have that sort of strength left in us? Once we’ve finished up here, the main force is returning to the country. I want to get them back quickly. Because the movements of Galleria and Rusworth are bothering me.”

They were two countries boasting equal, or greater national power than Zayin and Lorphys. Four countries of about the same scale.. that was the current state of Beim’s surroundings.

“Are they warring especially hard?”

“… When we sent out scouts, it seems it wasn’t just skirmishes. They’re truly monsters, it seems. Both parties have their female leaders at the forefront of every battle, so there’s little a gap. Good grief, in that case, it would’ve been better we left Selva in-between us.”

I could only give a bitter smile. Perhaps noticing my sarcasm, Alette-san apologized again.

“Sorry. That wasn’t my intent.”

“It’s alright. Now then, let’s start preparing. I’m sure the folks from Beim will come to buy off our Magic Stones soon, after all.”

“… Why Beim? And what do you mean they’ll come to buy them off?”

Seeing Alette-san’s confusion, I grinned, laughed, and explained.

❼

… At Beim’s Guild Headquarter, Gastone and Lonbolt were carrying out an intense back and forth.

Gaston’s face was bright red.

“What is the meaning of this; asking us to hand over the Magic Stones and materials we risked our lives to obtain!? And saying you’ll pay nothing to retake control of the fortress that prevented the advance of such an army of evil is simply too much!”

Beim’s executive personnel heard out his piece with bitter sentiment.

They had arbitrarily butted in to participate, and now they were saying they wouldn’t sell the Magic Stones and materials. They likely planned to take them home, and use them in their countries.

But the executive staff didn’t think the knights and soldiers of both countries would return alive. That fact had largely twisted their plans.

The merchants were quite forceful in their demand for the Guild to somehow dispose of the equipment that had been left over.

One of the executives spoke.

“Then how about trading for arms and armor? I’m sure your side has lost much equipment, so if it’s now… we’ll accept around this.”

When he displayed a conversion rate, it was Lonbolt’s turn to let his body go read up to the head, with an expression like that of a boiling octopus.

“The reward we attained from fighting with our lives on the line can only be traded for so little? What’s more, where we fall short, we’ll have to pay with gold, you say!?”

The executive immediately apologized.

“N-no, that is a misunderstanding. I understand. Then magic stones of this amount… how about this much?”

The rate was immediately altered, but the two men weren’t satisfied.

“Even in normal times, these rates would be strange. Are you taking us for fools? We didn’t need any equipment from the start. The Magic Stones and materials are plenty.”

For the Guild’s executive officers, it would be troublesome if the two counties made off with them. Of all else, they had refrained from getting their hands on a week’s worth of monster drops, and the resources they had saved up had been exchanged to weapons.

Meaning they had suddenly fallen into a dearth of Magic Stones and monster parts.

At the rate, problems would surface across the branches, so the executive staff looked amongst themselves.

“… In that case, we shall annul any remaining debt of both your countries. On top of that, an exchange with the weapons we have in store. How does that sound? Also, this is are final concession.”

To the serious faces of the executives, Gastone and Lonbolt made vexed faces.

But the Guild personnel thought.

(Even if they act tough, the national power to oppose Beim isn’t something either of their countries possesses.)

When Gastone nodded, Lonbolt reluctantly nodded as well. But then Gastone…

“… But giving it all would be troublesome on our side. At the very least, I’d like you to leave it at taking seventy percent of what we’ve reaped.”

Lonbolt was the same.

“For us as well. Having nothing left at all is out of the discussion.

Even after returning to the country, I won't be able to persuade a soul."

The Guild executives, after crunching some numbers, determined they would be able to somehow overcome the present situation, before smiling and nodding.

"Very well. From the portion taken by both your countries, Beim shall take over seventy percent. We shall prepare the weapons and armor on our side, and I'm sure you'd like to confirm it, so all you need do is send men to pick it up."

Hearing that, Lonbolt looked annoyed.

"All you're saying is that you'll have us shoulder the transportation costs."

An executive smiled wide.

"No, this is only because a quantity check is necessary. You wouldn't want twice the effort, would you?"

The executives, Gastone, and Lonbolt looked over the forms written up. And after confirming their contents, they signed them.

Beim's side was smiling, while Gastone and Lonbolt looked down with their shoulders shaking. The executive personnel were certain they were considerably irritated.

Behind the two who were thought to be vexed at the outcome, in the clothes of Zayin's temple maidens, stood May…

❼

A few days later.

Soldiers and mercenaries of Beim set to be stationed at the fortress dropped by.

But besides them, mercenaries hired to recover stones and materials, as well as transport squads were sent in large numbers.

The important-looking existences called the free knights of Beim came to the fortress, and lined up before us as we sat in the chairs of the commanders' room.

"Good work with defense. Henceforth, this fortress shall come back under Beim's management. You can return at once if you so desire."

Me, Alette-san, and Noy-san. The three of us were side by side.

You can return at once pretty much meant get out of here already.

"Also, this is the decision of your superiors. Seventy percent of the Magic Stones and materials will be conceded to Beim. You've my thanks for making it easier by neatly dividing and sorting them."

Before the new commander of the fortress, who was purposely trying to rile us up, the Third spoke after bursting into laughter.

『This one's no good. While we're at it, should we get him demoted as well? It's best the commander here be a proficient one.』

Milleia-san agreed as she giggled.

『I'm also for it. Now then, how shall we kick him of that high seat he's sitting in?』

As approval circled around, they immediately devised a means to kick him out on the spot.

(These guys' personalities are way too terrible.)

As I thought that, the free knight.

"Ah, also, leave behind the cannons that performed so well in battle. It'll just be a bother for you to carry them back to Beim, after all. You can't even use them there, right? We shall put them to better use."

I was dumbfounded. Noy-san couldn't stay quiet at that one.

"That's simply too much. Those cannons are…"

"It's fine!"

I stopped Noy-san, and shook my head. To the end, before the

newly-appointed commander, I had to play the part of a single adventurer of weak standing.

But I could hear the Fifth contain his laughter.

『C-could it be this one is actually trying to be considerate of us?』

The Fourth gave a grand laugh as well.

『He's so kind I'm being moved to tears. He's incompetent, but this is a miracle! I don't think I'll actually forget his face!』

I looked at the commander.

"… You're telling us to leave the cannons, correct?"

"Exactly. Taking something like that to the city will be nothing but trouble. But you've sure put them to good use. For that alone, I don't mind commending you."

There, the Seventh gave a delightful voice.

『And I don't mind commending your actions. A splendid man. For you to offer material to get you kicked out of office of your own accord, you really have a form of talent there. From our eyes, that is.』

"… Understood. Well then, we've preparations to make."

Watching us regretfully leave the room, the fortress' new commander haughtily stretched himself over the chair in satisfaction.

By the way, I was also quite satisfied.

(But seventy percent, is it? I was prepared for eighty to ninety, but I wonder if Gastone-san and co. were able to do well.)

❼

Leaving the fortress behind us, we returned to Beim.

I immediately brought my feet to the Trēs House's door. I had to make rounds to all the houses that backed us, but there was also

something I had to report to Vera.

When I entered the mansion, Vera raced over.

“Lyle! You’re not injured, right! If you are, I won’t forgive you!”

Accepting her embrace, I gave a bitter smile. In the mansion’s entrance hall were her younger sister Gina, and Gina’s boyfriend Roland, watching us from a little ways away.

Milleia-san perhaps surveying the surroundings…

『… Fidel-san isn’t here. It’s a bit of a shame. I wanted to fan his flames before his eyes again. You can’t imagine how many moves and lines I’ve thought up for that.』

The Third spoke as it to console her.

『It’s alright. We’ve got as many chances to stir him up as we want, from here on. Anyways, a single, ‘father-in-law’ is enough to make his rage cross the limit, so I can’t wait to see what you’ve got.』

These ones really do have terrible personalities.

And I made an apologetic face to Vera. In all seriousness, I really was sorry. The ancestors convinced me to concede the cannon to that commander free knight, so I followed along.

“Um, I’m sorry… well, I couldn’t take the cannons back. Beim’s free knights said to leave them at the fortress… and guns and gunpowder as well. I’m sorry.”

There, Vera burst into rage.

“I don’t care about something like that. I can just have more made. You’re safe, and that’s enough. Or were there any other injured?”

When I said there weren’t any serious injuries among my party members, she looked relieved.

Seeing the scene, the Fourth.

『… Yep, I think Vera-chan resembles my wife, just a bit.』

The Fifth spoke nostalgically.

『This thorny kindness definitely does remind me of mama.』

He said.

And the Seventh opened his mouth, enjoying himself.

『Now then, from here on is the fun part. I never thought the day would come for me to give thanks to Beim's adventurers and merchants. Lyle, it's fun time!』

Ignoring the high-tensioned ancestors, I told Vera the just of our defensive war.

❼

… At the Guild's main headquarters, taking his subordinates along, Fidel slammed a document down on the table.

His opponents, the Guild's executive personnel, were shaking before one of the top merchants of the city.

Fidel had heard the circumstances from Vera, and marched straight to the ones that had dispatched that free knight, Beim's adventurers' guild headquarters.

The forms were proof that the cannon and heavy weaponry had been borrowed from Fidel. Thinking it would be a pain if Lyle was going to be reluctant to return them, the man had personally written them up himself.

"Did you read them? Now read them again, and keep reading until you're sure there are no problems. This isn't just as a merchant, it's something you all need to keep mindful of as well."

The Guild executives sat in their chairs, and tried making themselves look smaller.

"E-even if he didn't know, for a free knight to thoughtlessly do something like this…"

In regards to the executives that had begun to make excuses, Fidel erupted. His mind remained calm, but he let his expression fill with rage.

“Who told you to give an excuse!? What I’m asking is how you plan to take responsibility! Just how much value do you think your excuses hold?”

The executives were likely loathing those free knights they had dispatched already. Even if they were called knights, they were former soldiers and adventurers.

The Guild took care of such management, while merchants could hold private armies and maintain military power separately.

Meaning the Guild had basically unlawfully seized the equipment of Fidel’s own private army.

The executives all apologized at once.

“We offer our deepest apologies! We shall retrieve and deliver it at once!”

But Fidel wasn’t satisfied.

“That was something loaded onto one of our company’s ships. You mean for us to sail the seas unarmed? I’m sure you’ll reimburse me for the loss I’ll face in their absence, right? I was preparing to set out as soon as I heard the borrower had returned, yet it turns out it wasn’t broken, but stolen. Of course, there’s a problem with the one I lent it to, but you also have fault for stealing it.”

The contract held that if Lyle broke them on the battlefield, he wouldn’t have to pay reparations. Fidel thought something like that wasn’t much a problem.

But if he could squeeze money out of another party, it was a different story. What’s more, this time, the Guild hadn’t been of any use. He had his dissatisfactions at them, and his actions also had the meaning of getting back at them.

One of the executives.

“… We will take charge of your losses on our side.”

And Fidel spoke in discontentment.

“He was more a thief or bandit than a commander, but is he really worthy of commanding Fortress Redant? It doesn’t look that way to me. How about you try sending someone a little more decent next time? That’s an important transport point. I think it’ll be too late once a problem’s already happened.”

The Guild staff immediately replied.

“Yes. We’ll send talented personnel at once. The dispatched commander will receive a harsh penalty, so could this matter be…”

“Very well. But having others know I was stolen from will have them make light of me. Won’t the Guild be troubled by strange rumors too?”

“T-that is true.”

With those words, Fidel made a smile.

“Yes, I’m sure. I’m sure… so, sign this form.”

When he took out another document, the executive officers’ faces stiffened.

“Let’s make it that I sold it to you. Use the cannons and guns for the fortress’ defense. In exchange, I’ll have twelve new cannons and guns made for my ships, and the Guild will shoulder the cost.”

The true number of cannons handed off at the fortress was ten. There wasn’t a man here that knew that fact, so they silently nodded.

Watching the Guild officers sign, Fidel nodded with a smile.

“There really were a lot of problems this time around. But I don’t mean to condemn you all for it. In the next meeting, I’ll advocate for you.”

There, they gave their thanks.

“T-thank you for your consideration.”
“Just how can I thank the Trēs House. I’ll definitely return the favor.”
“We will prepare the funds at once.”

Inside, Fidel thought…

(… More than this lot, that gigolo puts up a greater resistance. Rather, that damn gigolo really survived… he’s got the tenacity of a cockroach.)

❼

As I walked through Beim’s streets with Eva, I recalled the previous events, and made a tired expression.

Putting my right hand to left shoulder, I lightly turned my head.

“I can’t get used to that atmosphere back there.”

The scene I remembered was being surrounded by elves, and interrogated on my life experiences and sentiment on the battlefield. I couldn’t help but wonder just where their zeal was coming from.

After talking quite a bit, I paid the elf tribes that had taken part, and saw off their departure from Beim.

I’m sure the travelling elf troupes that joined in would avoid Bahnseim and spread around the continent in no time.

Eva delightedly walked to my side.

“Did something good happen?”

She stopped in her tracks, and made a pose as she spun around. She was a beauty, so it made for a pretty picture, but the surrounding people stopped, looked at her, and laughed.

“The truth is, a number of my songs are entering the market! As a daughter of the Nihil tribe leading the elves, my name shall be carved onto the slate of history!”

Rather than feel embarrassed at having her name come out, it

seems she felt quite delighted. The fact her personality was the polar opposite of mine made a cynical smile emerge on my face.

Letting out a sigh, I walked with Eva towards the mansion.

“Well, as long as the rumors spread, all’s well.”

She sent a wink at me.

“It’s alright. This time’s events were flashy, and historic, and what’s more, we even paid travel expenses and rewards, so I’m sure they’ll happily spread the tale. But up to now, you always said you didn’t want to be sung of, or recited, so what’s with the sudden change of heart?”

As Eva tilted her head, I looked up at the sky.

“Well, it became necessary, so I put it to action. That’s all it is. But…”

“But?”

“… Maybe you really will be telling my hero’s tale someday.”

When I quietly said it below audible level, Eva grabbed my shoulders, and pulled.

“Hey, what is it? Say it properly. Don’t leave me hanging.”

Pulled by Eva, I laughed, before taking her hand, and leading her all the way to the mansion.

Milleia (#･∀･): “Lyle receiving cockroach treatment… I cannot forgive it!”

Third Generation Head ヘ(゜∀゜ヘ): “Quite right (lol), so next time, we’re riling him especially hard (lolol).”

Milleia 。゜(*゜´∀`゜)゜ノ: “I just can’t wait (lolol), and wait, the people of Beim are so kind, it’s bringing tears to my eyes.”

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): “It’s true. They give us equipment and money for free. On top of that, they even give us fame. Speak ill

of them, and the goddess will punish you (lol).”

Fifth Generation Head (゜д゜): “No, it really is true. Just how much do they plan on contributing to us? They do it even if they hate us.”

Seventh Generation Head (▪A▪): “But in the end, we’ll definitely be parasiting… no, I mean policing them. There’s not a hint of compassion in that.”

Lyle (;´-`).。oO(It’s a good thing I didn’t have a Growth this time, but all I did today was tattle to Vera… the one who really moved was Fidel. This is bad, I really am becoming a gigolo.)

Epilogue

Epilogue

Beim opened a party to commemorate the war.

It was something opened for a multitude of reasons. Beim had barely fought at all, but it was mainly opened to show that this was Beim's victory, and not anyone else's.

The Guild's executives took part.

And the merchants.

The famous mercenary brigade chiefs.

Within all that, I was participating with Vera. The other members were on standby at the mansion. The reason being we weren't invited.

When I presented myself as Vera's company, surrounding eyes gathered on me.

In the corner of an annoyed Fidel-san's field of vision, I flirted with Vera by the ancestors' instructions to fan the man's flames.

"This is tasty."

When I took a bite of the food, Vera looked just a little fed-up. The reason was the surrounding reactions. They hadn't thought I would be attending, so I was attracting an excessive amount of attention, and yet no one tried to call out to me.

"Good grief. When I thought it strange that you said you wanted to come… why are you even here? You're not enjoying this at all, are you Lyle?"

The atmosphere was different from Zayin's victory party, and all the food and drink lined up were high-class articles.

I looked at them.

“No, I just wanted to see the latent power of Beim. Even after wasting so much money, still having this extent of financial leisure is just strange, isn’t it?”

The Fourth in the Jewel agreed.

『Exactly. It means we have to keep on wringing them out. And wringing them out isn’t exactly an easy task.』

Well, they ignored all the efforts of we who did most of it, and opened up a party, so wanting to tease them was half my reason for being here. And accompanying Vera into the hall to rile Fidel up was the other half.

If you wanted a bit of a more meaningful meaning, it was a provocative action towards Beim.

(… What could this be? From Beim’s point of view, am I a plague of misfortune?)

The one who succeeded in defending the fort everyone thought impossible, and brought loss to Beim was me. They had stocked up a large amount of equipment, but the majority of that was traded for Magic Stones and materials with Zayin and Lorphys, so the problem was solved.

But even those actions weren’t by any means a serious blow to the city. Because Beim had the power to retake their losses at a moment’s notice.

In the corner of Fidel-san’s eye, as he talked with another merchant, I grasped Vera’s hand.

He continued chatting amiably, but seeing his behavior, the Third burst into laughter.

『He’s taking glances this way! He’s definitely mindful of us!』

While I was provoking the surroundings, and enjoying the party, a merchant-esque young man approached with a smile. I had seen the young man, who gave off a refreshing vibe, somewhere. He looked at me.

“If it isn’t the Holy Knight. I’ve heard of your performance in this time’s defensive war. Did my house’s support prove of any help?”

He was one related to a House that backed us. Son, and heir. No wonder I had seen his face somewhere before, I thought, as I returned the smile.

“Yes. Because of it, we were able to attain victory. You have my thanks.”

I earnestly gave my gratitude.

After that, he went into some idle banter, keeping watchful of his surroundings. Meaning…

(My house properly supported the victor, he wants to show off.)

But the ancestors wouldn’t let this chance slip by.

Milleia-san spoke.

『Lyle, grab Vera-chan’s hand in a way this youth can see! Grab it like a lover. With your palms held together!』

I abided the orders of the excited woman, gripping Vera’s hand as per instruction. When I wondered what she had in mind, the young man looked between me and Vera.

“Oh my, it looks like I’m in the way here. My apologies. Do you get along well with the Trēs House’s young miss?”

When the youth asked that, the Fifth let his voice.

『Oh, looks like it’s time for Father-in-Law’s entrance.』

The one who raised a laughing voice, as he stretched and came our way, was Fidel-san. He had been watching us, and couldn’t take it anymore. Either that, or he finally managed to slip away from the party participants that had gathered around him.

Coming up to us…

“Vera, it’s fine and all to introduce your friends, but aren’t you getting a bit too close?”

To his daughter with a smile. And to me with a smile and cold eyes. I offered my greetings.

“Of course not, father-in-law.”

There, Fidel-san stepped on my foot in a way no one around could see.

The Seventh in the Jewel shouted out.

『Bastard! What are you doing to Lyle!? This isn’t going to end with simple riling!』

Being stepped on did hurt some, but it wasn’t something I couldn’t endure. The young man, sensed the atmosphere, and took his leave with a smile.

Fidel-san spoke in a low voice so no one else could hear.

“Brat… don’t get in over yourself. I can crush one like you underfoot whenever I want. Just like this!”

He started putting power into his foot, but suddenly broke into a cold sweat.

Looking down, I saw Vera’s heel was pushing into Fidel-san’s shoe.

“V-Vera… you’re hurting your father.”

Watching him maintain his expression, I thought, as expected of him. Vera was smiling as well.

“Then how about moving that foot of yours? And if you’re crushing Lyle, that means making an enemy of me as well.”

Removing his foot from me, he freed himself of the heel piercing into his own. An impression was left on his leather shoes.

“Vera, you’ve got to rethink it. This guy’s no good. I can’t forgive him as a man. In the first place, he’s the sort of guy who lives in a mansion surrounded by over ten other women. Just what do you like about him?”

In the party hall, I wasn’t the only one attracting stares anymore.

Those around were curious of my relation with the Trēs House, as I felt some fleeting glances being directed at us.

There, someone who seemed to be a Guild executive made his appearance. But not of the headquarters, likely from one of the branches.

He looked over us.

“If it isn’t Fidel-dono. Were you an acquaintance of Lyle-dono?”

I could understand he was being wary. With the Skills… All, Search… I could feel the vigilance of his guards, and while they were hiding it, the hostility they directed.

Making sure they could see it, I subtly showed off my hand linked with Vera’s.

“Yes, they’ve aided us greatly this time as well. The fact we could win was only possible because of the Trēs House, I say.”

I purposely emphasized the ‘as well’, as I sent a glance at Fidel-san. I didn’t know if he was annoyed at it, but his expression didn’t fall apart.

“It is a pleasure to hear you say it. By the way, I hear it’s been quite an ordeal at the South Branch, right?”

Based on Fidel-san’s words, the other party was part of the South Branch’s management.

(The South Branch was the one specializing in mercenary brigades.)

The man shrugged his shoulders.

“If we hire mercenaries, but don’t get the results, there’s little to be earned. We were enthusiastic about slaying a large force of monsters this time, but someone got in our way, after all.”

His reaction flickered from yellow to red for an instant. I looked at him with a smile.

“Well that’s unfortunate. If you didn’t stay holed up here, and dropped by the fortress, I’m sure you’d have made a bit.”

… I provoked him. A cold sweat was breaking out on my back, but the one who recommended it was, naturally enough, the ancestors.

The Seventh was especially on board.

『Lyle, give it to him straight. That if you're too much a coward, it's only natural you don't make money. While you're at it, tell him to do a better job of concealing his malice. And finally… rile him up! Rile him up more!』

In regards to the executive charged with getting the mercenaries together, the Seventh was especially strong-willed.

At a voice level he could hear…

"You should really work on hiding your malice there. And your guard beside you has been acting much too mindful of me."

When I said that with a smile, the South Branch executive's expression didn't change.

"I wonder what you could be talking about. Could it be you're tired out from battle? Then instead of showing up in a place like this, shouldn't you be getting some rest?"

Something of that extent wouldn't work anyone up. While his surface expression was smoothed over, I could tell my opponent was holding back. With the Sixth's Skill Search, the South Branch executive's guards had turned bright red.

Other than them, there were quite a few who were now directing hostility at me.

(… Why did I come here again? It's definitely strange to attend if all I really wanted to do was rile everyone up.)

Until the party ended, I pretended to enjoy its events with Vera.

❼

The next day.

I had headed back for the mansion, when Old Letarta's grandson【Gols】barged in early in the morning, and cried out.

In front of the large storehouse in the mansion's yard, he appealed to Old Letarta in tears.

"Please come back, grandpa! An order came in from the Trēs Hous for twelve whole cannons! We're all worn out, yet they're telling us to hurry! What's more, guns as well. We'll never make it in time!"

It seems the equipment I left at the fortress was bringing trouble to Letarta's smithery. Emerging in a tank top, perhaps he had been brushing his teeth, as old Letarta had a cup and brush in his hands.

But with a smile.

"Sorry, but the time has come for me to live by my hobbies. To be blunt, the time has come for me to toss all my responsibility… no, I mean to leave the shop to my stepson. So go tell the lad. 'It's already your generation'."

It was a radiant smile. Honestly, throwing all his work to his stepson, and living by his hobbies… even for an amazing craftsman, how cruel.

I watched the scene from a window on the first floor, and Gols yelled again. There was a wooden crate by his side, and it seems he had brought some sort of parcel along.

"Oy, Grandpa! You just said toss all responsibility, didn't you! I'm begging you, come back! We really won't finish in time."

Old Letarta happily stuck up his thumb.

"Do your best. Having work to do is a good thing. And such an environment is just what you need to polish your skills, so it'll all work out."

"Gramps! It's because you took on a strange request that it came to this! Can't you at least tell the Trēs House head to do something about the date he set!?"

Watching him on the verge of tears, I thought I had done a bad thing.

But even seeing his grandson like that, old Letarta seemed more interested in the contents of the crate.

“So what’s that?”

Gols also sent his gaze at the wooden crate. After letting out a sigh, he opened it.

“I serviced the Katanas he returned. And I also brought some new ones I made. And wait, do I really have to continue this request? There’s a mountain of work to do.”

Old Letarta took a katana from the crate, drew it, closed one eye, and inspected it.

“Hmm, looks better than the last ones you made. Well, it’s good to be devoted to a task for a while. I’ll put in a word to that Fidel whelp. But this is definitely completely different from a Sabre.”

It seems he didn’t believe Monica’s words that it was similar enough.

“… I’m begging you. Rather, I don’t have any time left to spare, so making more is impossible, I tell you. Could you talk to the requester too?

When Gols finished his business, he left the mansion. Noticing me watching, Letarta beckoned me out.

❼

Accepting the serviced Katanas I used in battle, and the new ones, I tested their feel.

The new Katana’s blade was made shorter, making it easier to swing around.

I tried swinging it in the yard. The handle was finally modified for two-handed use, making it easier to handle.

Watching my actions, old Letarta took a memo of the points that caught his attention.

“It was made just per that young lady’s instructions, but this is an easy weapon to break. Even with rare metal, using magic iron is completely useless.”

My audience as I practiced with the Katana included Damien as well.

He came out of the storehouse, tended to by the maids, and looked in my directions. Rather than the Katana, he had something to ask in regards to the Valkyries.

“More importantly, it’s about those three units. Their maintenance is surprisingly troublesome. From next time onwards, I plan to simplify and mass produce, but do you have any requests?”

Maybe Damien wanted the data he could get from the Valkyrie series, as he was quite proactive on the project. In truth, the Valkyrie development was a large step forward in his research.

“Ah, then could you contain the Mana consumption? If there are too many of them, the Mana drain isn’t something to make light of.

There, Damien put his hand to his chin in thought.

“In that case, they’ll need to be supplied through different means. Just where on their bodies could I put a device like that…”

Hearing that, old Letarta offered his take.

“Can’t it just be external?”

“Right!”

The two of them burst into laughter, before returning to the storehouse together. It seems a new idea had been born. They went right to work.

I saw off the backs of the three automatons following them.

“… Letarta’s started living here as if it were natural.”

I said.

Scratching my head in the empty yard, I looked up at the sky.

“Guess I should go ask some things in the Jewel today.”

❼

Within the Jewel.

I entered my own room of memories. As always, Milleia-san came along.

I went to meet with Septem, but this time the metropolis was in considerable ruin. Walking down the street, the thin and weakened people leaned and sat against the walls of the buildings.

Milleia-san walked up front, a I winced at the sights even worse than the last time.

“Why did it come to this?”

I knew the reason. And while I knew it would happen, I hadn’t even imagined it would be as bad as this. Couldn’t they have done something before it all came to this? I couldn’t help but wonder.

Milleia-san spoke.

『It’s because Septem-sama was supporting everything alone. She tried raising up magician apprentices, but they couldn’t bring themselves to serve the people as devotedly as she. Eventually, they chose to abandon the people who could never bring themselves to do anything, and disappeared.』

And those that had learned magic brought their techniques to other lands. Milleia-san said it was the start of the nobility.

『Like that, the magicians who attained magic took this city’s tale as a warning, and established their own knowledge. Leaving descendants with more proficient ones each generation, they polished their magic tech as much as they could… a new ruling class came onto the stage.』

It was the start of us nobles. The nobles up to then hadn’t been definite magicians, but this brought about the phenomenon that

magic itself was the proof of nobility.

Septem-san's mansion had rotted away, and a portion of the roof had disappeared.

Walking through its halls, I could see the sky, covered by a gray sheet of clouds.

Milleia-san spoke.

『Among the generations of Septem-samas, she was a powerful one. Too powerful. And too kind to an extent she ruined everything. She birthed the result of a more advanced form of magic spreading through the continent.』

When we entered Septem-san's room, the bed had rotten through, and a Septem-san that wasn't an old woman was sitting in a chair.

A young girl sat, noticed us, and called out. The air she gave off was definitely Septem-san's. But her voice was still young.

『Oh my, you truly do have the worst timing. A little longer, and it would have looped back to the village.』

When Septem-san said that, I gave a bitter smile. And…

"I have something I want to ask."

『What could it be?』

I asked what had been on my mind for a while. It was how Septem… how Agrissa was defeated.

"Three hundred years ago, Agrissa was defeated."

『She sure was.』

"But the method used to defeat her was never recorded. In order to stop Celes, we can't help but want to know the means used to defeat Agrissa."

Seeing my serious expression, the young Septem-san made a bit of a troubled face. Did she think we wouldn't be able to do it ourselves? When I thought that, she opened her mouth.

『I'm sorry, but Agrissa could create Skills. And the body to use them as well. I can't even imagine what sorts of Skills she held. Maybe she could handle everything… but…』

But… with those words, Septem-san stood from her seat, and stood before me.

『You're the same, Lyle.』

"I am?"

Septem-san smiled. She smiled, and spoke of how much a wonder my very existence was.

『Your ancestors all held the blue jewel, and passed down their Skills. Over their lives, their bodies changed to specialize in Support Class Skills. Having inherited it all, in a sense, it's only natural that your body excels in using Support Skills.』

Because of the gem the First bought at a discount, it became easy for we of the Walt House to manifest Support Class Skills, and to make them more powerful.

Generation over generation, a bloodline polished to support…

『Lyle, your Experience, and Connection are Skills that didn't originally exist. They appear completely different, yet they share a common point. What you who was always stolen from would seek out, Experience… a Skill to let you gain much more experience… meaning to build up strength for the distant【Future】. Connection allows many to share their experience of the【Present】. Even I can't tell what your Third Stage will be, but I'm sure it should be linked to the【Past】.』

I thought my Skills were all over the place without a common point. But it seems they had the same base of experience.

"It kinda seems strange that the past is the last one. Wouldn't it have been better the other way around?"

Septem-san laughed.

『Right. But the current you already has the knowledge and

experience of your ancestors of the past in your hands, and you're dealing with their weapons in the present. What's more, you're trying to obtain the future. The opposite of your Skill. If you do plan to win against Celes, perhaps your own Skill will be the key.』

I thought a little.

If My Skill was one that didn't originally exist, then even Agrissa and Celes shouldn't have knowledge of it. It truly might be an important key for victory.

There, Milleia-san hit against her shoulders.

Turning, I saw Milleia-san was staring at Septem-san. And when I looked back at her…

『… It seems the Jewel believes this is the end of what I'm to tell you.』

Septem-san was wrapped in light. The surrounding scene dissolved into grains of gold, disappearing as if blown away by the wing.

"Eh? Hey! I still have things I want to ask!"

Septem-san shook her head.

『Then ask the next person. And… while my words are uncertain, the Jewel knows the truth. It seems it just wasn't my role to tell you those answers.』

Still with a smile, Septem-san faded to golden grains, and disappeared. I reached out my hand, but couldn't touch anything.

But I could hear her voice.

『It's alright. The next person will teach you… do your best, descendent of mine.』

I heard her laugh to herself, as in my daze, I found myself in the round table meeting room before I had even realized it.

"… I see, so I carried Septem-san's blood as well."

It was natural, but I had forgotten that truth. That Celes inherited the

memories of Septem meant that Septem-san's blood flowed through my veins as well.

Milleia-san was a little amazed.

『Good grief, you didn't even notice that?』

"But when I'm usually talking with the ancestors, I get the feeling, ah, so I really am descended from these guys… to put it the other way, I couldn't really imagine anyone else in that role."

Milleia-san spoke to me kindly.

『Up to your birth, it only natural that many people were involved. It wasn't just the Walt House. The clans of their wives are all part of it as well. Even without direct relations, many gears of fate turned for you to exist.』

At first it had sounded outrageous, but now I noticed it was only natural.

It wasn't just me. All humans were like that.

"… I'd never really thought about it."

『Right? Now then, I wonder what the next person will be like. I hope they'll be fun.』

From her tone of voice, it seems Milleia-san already knew.

(… Come to think of it, this person was so carefree I've forgotten it lately, but she was the Jewel's guide, was she?)

This time, Septem-san taught me a lot.

About magic. About Skills. About goddesses.

And… About Novem as well.

The fact that I have fate with the goddesses could be because I carry Septem-san's blood, couldn't it?

And the gem the Walt House just happened to buy, made a body specialized in the use of Support Class Skills. I got to learn about

that.

(… That may be one of the reasons for the ancestors potent array of Skills. In that case, gems will get a new value on the market.)

I had quite a lot to think about, but it wasn't going to come together at once. I turned back to the round table, to find the ancestors looking my way.

The Third spoke in his usual smile.

『Were there any developments?』

He asked me. The Fourth removed his glasses, and wiped off the lenses.

『By your current disposition, I'm to assume the plug's been pulled on your conversations with Septem. Now then, how about you let us hear it too?』

The Fifth looked as uninterested as ever, but when he looked at me…

『Well, just talk about it. It'll be much easier than holing it up in yourself.』

Or so he said. These days, I've come to understand the Fifth just a little more. His usual uninterested air was a something similar to hiding his embarrassment.

The Seventh turned his gaze from me to Milleia-san.

『Come to think of it, aunty was supposed to be a guide, for argument's sake. She kept getting rowdy with the Third, so I had forgotten. The terrible nature of two personalities attracts…』

He spoke ill of Milleia-san with a smile, but he never got to finish those words.

Milleia-san who was supposed to be beside me pounded her fist into his face with a smile.

Just when did she move? And surprisingly, Milleia-san began to look quite powerful in my eyes. Her frail impression was blown away…

no, I never had such an impression to start with.

『Oh, Brod you trouble-maker. You're making your big sister Milleia angry. Even when you used to be so cute.』

The Seventh held his nose.

『I've forgotten that past.』

He said.

Milleia-san looked a little fed-up as she shrugged her shoulders.

『Same as always, I see. Well, as my brother's son, I'm sure you've got quite a few harsh memories.』

It seems the Seventh was holding in a bit. I never felt anything like that while he was alive. But within the Jewel, he said quite a few things that caught my interest.

He seemed to have something towards the Sixth that had morphed into stubbornness.

There, Milleia-san looked at the Fifth's face. When the Fifth noticed her…

『What?』

『Father, since you're here, show Lyle your memory. See, there's still an important portion you haven't shown him, right?』

After making a blatantly reluctant face, he refused in all seriousness.

『I refuse. In the first place, my memories are irrelevant to the boy. For now, we should prioritize efficiency.』

Milleia-san spoke with a smile.

『I think it's important. It's something Lyle will need from here on, and more than anything, you do feel some responsibility, don't you? That when up to your point, the Walt House had aimed for a warm household, but you crushed it all in your generation.』

The Fifth stood, and returned to his room of memories.

“Um…

『I made him angry.』

She stuck out her tongue a bit, and closed one eye as she said that, but her expression was just a bit sorrowful.

The Fourth looked curious. More than that, it seems he had an idea of what it was.

『… I don’t think it’s a good thing to reveal the secrets someone’s trying to hide. Even so, do you want Lyle to know?』

Milleia-san nodded. After nodding, she sent a look to the Seventh.

❼

…. In Beim’s neighboring land, an army of Bahnseim marched.

The knights that entered the capital destroyed by monsters dispersed, and began eliminating the remaining monsters.

The land they had newly acquired was to become a land under direct Bahnseimian control. Eventually, perhaps someone would be awarded the territory as a reward for their achievements.

Within all of that, a report came to the general, who’s made a base out of a building that was still useable.

“General. According to the scouts who went out in Beim’s direction, Beim is still safe. They turned one of their important points to a fortress, and managed to hold back the monsters.”

Hearing that, the general laughed.

“Well isn’t that amazing? As expected, Beim didn’t fall. Well, having them fall would be troublesome. If we had to march and reclaim that far, my bones would break. Also, we still have commerce with them, so having them fall will be a pain in various ways.”

The middle aged general sat in his chair, finishing up his mountain of paperwork with a grin. The knight who reported seemed quite

curious.

“General, this times soldier dispatch seemed considerably content.”

There, the general looked at the knight’s face before nodded. His probing eyes did bother the knight, but the general stopped his working hands, stood from his seat, and looked out the window.

Out there, the scene of the city destroyed by monsters unfolded.

“Well, it’s a job anyone would hate to do. But if it’s a job that lets me get away from the center of it, then I’m thankful. You’re not from Centralle, are you?”

On the general’s words, the knight nodded.

“Yes. I was raised in a village a little away from Centralle. It was declared that this time’s expedition wouldn’t be using Centralle’s knights, so we were kinda scraped together.”

After laughing a little, the general.

“Yeah, that’s what I had them do. I sought out subordinates as unrelated to Centralle and the current royal faction as I could.”

The knight tilted his head. Thinking he didn’t understand, the general gave a bitter smile.

“Your response troubles me. But just know I wanted subordinates like that. Stay in Centralle, and you’ll get to think that way whether you like it or not. Now then, back to work. When I’m not in Centralle, everything just feels nice and easy.”

Still holding questions towards the generals speech and conduct, the knight left the room…

Postscript Theater

~ Let's Play a Card Game Postscript Theater ~

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): "Fwahahaha, did you see! The strongest 'Celes' card has been placed on the field. Meanwhile, your field has nothing but a single ''Damn Gigolo Lyle' card… With this, you're over, Third Generation Head!"

Third Generation Head (`･ω･´): "… Not yet! I can't lose yet! It's my turn! Draw!"

Third Generation Head (￣ー￣)*Grin*: "Hmm, finally the card has come…"

Fourth Generation Head (;-@∀@): "W-what are you talking about! A comeback at this point is…"

Third Generation Head (`･ω･´): "Oh yes I can! I sacrifice all of Lyle's future to the graveyard to summon the 'Wives'! On top of that, I discard all of his shame and everything else to level up 'Damn Gigolo Lyle' to 'mr. lyle'!"

Fourth Generation Head (;-@∀@): "S-say what!?"

Third Generation Head (゜∀゜): "It's not over yet! On top of all that, I activate Lyle's effect! By maximizing his Gigolo Constitution, the abilities of the Wives rise even further! And female enemy cards on the field receive a decrease in stats! Until your life points hit zero, I'll keep on chipping…"

Fourth Generation Head (;-@∀@): "You can't just summon a bunch of monsters in one turn, that's against the rules! And wait, that effect doesn't even work on Celes, you hear! You lose by default, father."

Third Generation Head (･∀･): "…"

Fourth Generation Head *Kapow*∵(@ε(○＝(゜∀゜) Third Generation Head: "I attack your life points directly!"

Fourth Generation Head (@д@⊂彡☆))Д゜) *Thwap*: “That’s also against the rules.”

~ Mrs. Milleia, Part 1 ~

Milleia (´∀`): “Uhaha, our profits in Beim are simply scrumptious (lolol), keep on wringing them out (lolol). ”

Fifth Generation Head (;∀;): (The Sixth sure disappeared at a good time. She used to be so honest… huh? Wait, was she always like this?)

~ Mrs. Milleia, Part 2 ~

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): “Milleia-chan, were you like that? Were you putting on an act in front of the Sixth?”

Milleia 。・゜・(ノ∀`)・゜・。: “Is that how you see me? Grandfather, how cruel!”

Fourth Generation Head (;-@∀@): “Eh? Um… S-sorry!”

Seventh Generation Head |ω・`): (How shameful, Fourth… but the Sixth is also at fault for not seeing through that shady-as-all-hell personality.)

~ Mrs. Milleia, Part 3 ~

Milleia (・∀・): “… Even like this, I’m a ‘kind elder sister character’ you know. I’ll just throw this out there, but that’s why the Jewel chose me in the first place. The other women were much worse than me, you hear.”

Milleia (・∀・): “Don’t forget it.”

Seventh Generation Head|д゜) *glance*: “It’s a lie. And elder sister? The Jewel definitely made a mistake with its personnel sel–”

Milleia (´∀`);y=ー(゜д゜)・∵.*Bang*: “Oh, Brod-kun, you just don’t learn, do you (lolol).”

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